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# Re-imagining community identity through articulation: a case study of two newspapers, a strike, and a community's negotiation of change

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**Re-imagining community identity through articulation: A case  
study of two newspapers, a strike, and a community's negotiation  
of change**

by

Andrea Breemer Frantz

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Rhetoric and Professional Communication

Program of Study Committee:

David D. Roberts, Major Professor  
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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2003

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**This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation of**

**Andrea Breemer Frantz**

**has met the dissertation requirements of Iowa State University**

Signature was redacted for privacy.

**Major Professor**

Signature was redacted for privacy.

**For the Major Program**

This work is dedicated to the two people who  
sacrificed most to ensure its completion.

*For Michael and Hannah...  
my reasons for everything*

## Foreword

This work is the product of several years of struggle. Like many before me who have been through this process, I wrestled with how and what to write. I even wrestled with *whether* to write it.

As with any large-scale research project, I see this as the product of both conscious and unconscious collaboration. Many voices guided me through the seemingly endless and occasionally very dark mine tunnel. Some knew they were guiding me. Some influenced how I did things without knowing I was watching or listening. I am indebted to those people without whose encouragement and input this work would not have been written—at least not half as well. While I cannot name everyone here—the list would overwhelm—there are several who deserve special thanks.

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## Chapter 1

# Re-imagining Community Identity Through Articulation: A Case Study of Two Newspapers, a Strike, and a Community's Negotiation of Change

## Introduction

A couple of years ago I was invited to a dinner party. It was one of those social gatherings at which most of the attendees knew only the host, so we were introduced all around and the challenge became finding something to talk about with people I had just met. This challenge, of course, is really the ever-present tension we feel to varying degrees throughout our lives in nearly every social situation. As social beings, humans naturally seem to seek some connection, some identification with one another. At the party, I was struck by how many times I was asked, "So, where are you from?"

I would frequently answer, "Originally from central Iowa, most recently from northwestern Iowa," because both towns to which I claimed some form of residency—one in which I was raised, the other in which I started my adult and professional life—are small, rural communities, ones I would not expect acquaintances in Pennsylvania to readily recognize by name.

But more often than not the person with whom I was speaking would push me for details. "What's the name of the town? Oh, Grinnell. Well is that anywhere near Dubuque? I knew a guy in the textile business who moved out there back in the 1970s."

Or, "Sure, I know where Storm Lake is. Don't they have a big Amish settlement there?"

"No, that's near the Amana Colonies, I think."

"Oh, no! I remember now. Storm Lake was that Iowa town they featured in *U.S. News and World Report* awhile back, isn't it? The place with the meat packing plant?"

"That's the one."

In that setting, where people actively sought some identifying characteristic that forged a connection, albeit perhaps an impermanent one, *place* was frequently where conversation started.

I experienced a similar situation as I was riding the subway in New York City just a few months ago, a space I wouldn't have previously associated with efforts at forging social ties. I was riding downtown from Harlem relatively early in the morning. The stop at 125th Street that normally offered the number 9 train to downtown was undergoing some repairs; thus, people had to in effect travel uptown from that station, deeper into Harlem, and transfer trains in order to reach Midtown. Naturally, such variation in routine caused some distress among commuters trying to make it to work on time. Successfully having navigated myself to the correct alternate train, I was feeling rather accomplished. Then a man standing next to me, clearly a little agitated and checking his watch, turned to me and asked, "I heard they're skipping some stops because of the delays. Do you have any idea if this is stopping at 59th Street?"

"I'm sorry, I don't. I'm just hoping it stops at 42nd Street," I answered.

"Oh, you *know* it would never skip *that* stop. But 59th, well, that's another story."

"Actually," I explained, ignoring all warnings from friends never to identify myself as an out-of-towner, "I *don't* know. I don't do this much."

"Oh," he said with a knowing smile. "You drive?" The way he said the word *drive* in this instance made me feel he held both disdain and respect for such a claim.

"Yes, but not here."

We both laughed and my response prompted him to ask where I was from, which began a conversation about the "skills" commuters needed to get to work on the subway in Manhattan. After the exchange, the man claimed I was one step closer to calling myself a New Yorker.

But his comment, and the feelings I had when I identified myself at the dinner party as an Iowan, raised a few questions: First, why would I *want* to call myself a New Yorker? Or a Storm Laker? Or a Grinnellian? Or—as is the case for me now—a Pennsylvanian? And what do such labels mean to me? To people born and raised in those communities? To people who know those communities from a

distance? How do we determine these identities? How are they forged? How do they evolve and change? Can we agree on them? And why is insight into identity formation even important?

### **Knowledge Creation and Identity**

I'll address the last question first. If, as Kathryn Woodward suggests, "Identities are produced, consumed and regulated within culture—creating meanings through symbolic systems of representation about the identity positions we might adopt" (2), then we might assume that the only way to understand the significance of an occurrence, the importance of a text, or the reason for behavior in any social setting is by examining the process and evolution of its representation and identification. In effect, identity plays a key role in knowledge creation because it informs both the representation of meaning and its interpretation.

Global changes and shifts in political and economic structures and allegiances in the contemporary world foreground identity questions and the struggle to assert and maintain national and ethnic identities. Even if the past which current identities reconstruct was only ever imagined, it is defined as offering some certainty in a climate of change, fluidity and increasing uncertainty. (Woodward 18)

One contemporary example of the "struggle to assert national identity" is clearly illustrated in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Immediately following the attacks, government officials, media pundits, and individual citizens tried to articulate what would cause the al Qaeda network to have such hatred for the United States. In "Roots of Rage" (Beyer 23) a *Time* magazine writer effectively asked the key question: How do global perceptions of the United States as foreign policy bully, economic giant, and cultural narcissist ultimately lead to the sort of anger and hatred that fuels such attack?

While Americans struggled with the answers to that question, many sought to reassert their patriotism. American flags waved in private and public spaces. Donations poured in through the Red Cross to help victims of the attacks. And children could be heard on radio stations across the country reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. In national memorial services such as the one held in Yankee Stadium shortly after the attacks, political leaders (Rudy Giuliani, for example), new heroes

(New York City firefighters and police), and clergy from many faiths rearticulated American ideals of bravery, solidarity, selflessness, and defiance in the face of challenge. By pointing to new narratives from shared experience, the speakers—some well-known, some relative strangers to the public—overlapped and connected issues, ideas, and images to create, albeit temporarily, a shared sense of self.

### **Community and shared experience**

Since the concept of “shared experience” is actually possible in a variety of ways, I should clarify my use of the term “shared experience” here. While not all of us were in New York City when the first plane hit the World Trade Center, many Americans were “there” via news reports on CNN and the other networks shortly thereafter. Because I teach in a community just two hours from NYC, my students and colleagues were certainly “there” in the sense that family members and friends were among those initially listed as missing. Thus, as a member of that community, the attacks felt extraordinarily personal, as though they’d happened in my back yard.

However, I did not, nor could I, experience in the same way what a close friend did when he stood with a firefighter under an awning in Tower 7 when Tower 2 came rushing to the ground. My friend, a photojournalist, was briefly buried, along with approximately a dozen other people, in the rubble. While he has since tried to articulate the experience to me, tried to convey the sensory and emotional impact the happening had for him, I cannot possibly share beyond my identification with his words.

I would argue, however, that shared experience can also simply be a major event or events about which we feel compelled to communicate—we need not have felt the winds or heard the thunder of the buildings toppling to have “experienced” the event. Our senses, our histories, our ability to communicate about such things distinguish us all. No experience is ever “shared” in the sense that it is lived out in the same way for two people, let alone a whole community. But we can forge temporary ties using symbols and signs (words, gestures, facial expressions, etc.) to share in the meaning of a happening at least temporarily. Clearly, many in New

York and Washington D.C. witnessed the devastation first-hand. Those in northeast Pennsylvania or New Jersey witnessed it differently, more as close neighbors of New Yorkers, Washington, D.C., and western Pennsylvania where the last plane crashed. And those in California or Utah witnessed it from a significantly greater physical distance, primarily through television, Internet, newspaper, and radio coverage. However the experience might be defined, the “shared” nature of the attacks was articulated through a collective sense of loss and shock.

Through the stories related via the media, the messages shared in places of worship and workplace bulletin boards, indeed, even through art and music, a rearticulation of American (national) identity began to take shape. It was as though by reasserting the ideal qualities of resilience, determination and toughness amongst ourselves, Americans (or those we looked to as our mouthpieces during that time) were also trying to renegotiate the United States’ identity among other nations—both friend and foe. To convince others of our strength, our solidarity, and our “goodness,” we first had to convince ourselves.

In terms of an American sense of self—even if that sense is fleeting and continually shifting—perhaps the greatest challenge lies in understanding what the concepts of resilience, solidarity, and bravery *mean* to Americans and to outsiders. Enemies across the globe might have interpreted the patriotism that emerged from the period immediately following the attacks as arrogance. It is interesting to note the apparent duality of the positions in this case of identity rearticulation in America following the attacks. For most Americans—and this was certainly reflected in the abundant media coverage immediately following—the sense of self seemed to emerge from an “us” versus “them” mentality. Such duality reflects the concept of *difference* highlighted in much of the literature on identity formation and articulation.

### **Difference: negotiating tensions**

If identities are ultimately shaped and negotiated through discourse, it is important to begin by understanding *how* such negotiation occurs. Negotiation only becomes necessary when tension between two or more perceptions of self occurs. As Hall argues, identities emerge primarily when people mark off the boundaries of



those differences in perception. It is in the fine lines of distinction we make (between words, experiences, values) that help us to define who we are.

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of marking off difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity—an 'identity' in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation). Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside difference. (Hall "Introduction"4)

Stuart Hall (see also Grossberg, 1996, 1992; Derrida, 1978; Laclau, 1990; Brah, 1996) has consistently focused on the issue of *différance* as a starting place for understanding identity. Citing Christopher Norris, Stuart Hall examines the concept of *différance* as it was first posited by Jacques Derrida. Derrida uses the alternate spelling of the word to play on the co-equal concepts of "to differ" and "to defer." While *différance* does relate to those tensions of "otherness" or separateness (to be different), the key lies also in understanding that meaning is almost always *deferred*, is constantly unsettled and dynamic (Hall "Cultural identity and diaspora"230). Thus, if meaning is almost always deferred or delayed, and is located at least partially in the tension of difference, we allow that identity negotiation is just that—a process of struggle.

Does a sense of *différance* preclude a shared or community identity, then? I don't think so. While locating identity through *différance* certainly seems to privilege a seemingly more fragmented understanding of who and what we are in any given moment, it is in the very social nature of the negotiation process—the *discursive exchange*—that we come to shared meaning. Even if meaning is deferred or temporary, that social connection and identification with one another—albeit brief—is the goal.

However, in most instances the standard sorts of binaries we may associate with the concept of difference are precisely the sorts of fixed notions cultural theorists encourage us to avoid (e.g., "good" versus "evil", the "haves" and the

“have nots”, “male” or “female”). What is “evil” at one moment in time, in a specific instance, may in fact be interpreted very differently ten years down the road. For example, when President Gerald Ford chose to grant former President Richard Nixon a full executive pardon for his actions associated with the Watergate scandal, Ford did so under the auspices of “helping the nation to heal.” Ford was roundly criticized for his action, and according to a 1976 Gallup poll over 65% of American people felt that the pardon was the wrong decision, that it harmed the American justice system, and that it adversely affected our national identity worldwide.

At the time, former President Nixon was widely regarded as a pariah—many voters and politicians alike wanted Nixon prosecuted for his transgressions. President Ford’s pardon was regarded as “weak” and some said later it hurt his chances against Jimmy Carter in the 1976 presidential race. However, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Watergate break-in recently, an ABC News poll found that six in 10 now think the pardon was the right thing to do, almost twice as many as the 35 percent who felt that way in 1976. Political analysts now widely regard Ford’s action as an “independent” and “bold” political move.

Regardless of whether we look at Gerald Ford’s identity as president, or the perceptions the American public had of U.S. national identity at the time, we see that reflections on the impact of the executive pardon appear to have changed over time. As U.S. citizens in 2002, we have almost 30 more years of history—experience—upon which to base our perceptions of national identity. While the act itself does not change, certainly its impact over time does. And that impact adds to our perceptions of self and of community in the here and now. Thus, understanding identity may not be about pinpointing some sort of “truth” or clearly defined sense of self from a particular historical juncture (an archaeology, as Foucault may call it), but rather, a re-telling, a rearticulation of that sense of self in new contexts.

The study of identity has undergone a shift in recent years away from essentialist claims of fixed or unchanging identities—“historical truth” or adherence to some sort of essential core—and instead researchers acknowledge the situatedness of identity. Woodward notes that identity is indeed relational, and

difference is established through *symbolic marking* in relation to others (12). We measure our own sense of identity according to our response to social interaction and internal classification systems. For example, hearkening back to my story of the dinner party at the beginning of this chapter, my identity as Iowan shifts slightly according to the ways in which the towns I refer to are understood within the social setting. Am I from the Amish community or the meat-packing community? Either way, whether or not I am Amish or have worked in a meat packing plant myself, the association I have with communities known for certain social symbols shape strangers' perceptions of me.

According to Woodward, "Identity is...maintained through *social* and *material* conditions...The *social* and the *symbolic* refer to two different processes, but each is necessary for the marking and maintaining of identities. Symbolic marking is how we make sense of social relations and practices; for example, regarding who is excluded and who is included. Social differentiation is how these classifications of difference are 'lived out' in social relations" (12). For example, when I introduce myself to my students every semester, I almost always end by telling them that I am a dedicated and loyal New York Yankees fan. This label symbolically marks me in a number of ways to my students. They learn that I am not only a Yankees fan, but also someone who knows and follows major league baseball.

But this marking also helps my students to determine—at least on this one very basic level—how they may interact with me, how they may socially differentiate themselves from me and my position. Braves fans, for example, may see me as a potential adversary, especially during the play-offs. Others may simply determine we share a common affinity for the game and therefore have something to talk about beyond where to put the attribution for a direct quote in their news stories. Some may find my attraction to the game of baseball as shallow or silly and opt to distance themselves socially. Still others may wonder if my affinity for a team owned by George Steinbrenner (widely regarded as the most arrogant man in baseball) is a signal that I, too, am domineering and unreasonable.

Based on our individual interpretations of this particular symbolic marking (and also how it combines with other aspects of my public persona and their interactions with me), we position ourselves socially, and my students begin on

some level to determine how we may connect or not connect. This process is a constant negotiation; therefore, what symbolic marking we may do, is frequently challenged and reevaluated as social differentiation takes place.

### Diaspora and relational networks

Stuart Hall's research on cultural identity warns us to avoid over-simplifying this process of negotiation, however.

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (Hall "Cultural identity and diaspora" 1)

In his ground-breaking work, Hall examines the concept of *diaspora* as one means of understanding the constitutive nature of identity. In its most basic definition, diaspora means to disperse or scatter. Applied to cultural identity, however, the concept broadens and forces us to seek relationships, connections, and disconnections across people, places, and circumstances. Most commonly associated with nation-building, diaspora often denotes a *forced* displacement of citizens—i.e., the ethnic cleansing in Rwanda in 1994—and is applied to large groups of people. For some cultural studies theorists, diaspora folds in the memories and experiences from previous locations with the circumstances of the moment. Woodward notes, "The term *diaspora* identifies a **relational network**, characteristically produced by forced dispersal and reluctant scattering...[I]dentity is focused less on the equalizing, proto-democratic force of common territory and more on the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration defined by a strong sense of the dangers involved in forgetting the location of origin and the process of dispersal" (emphasis mine, 318). Thus, diaspora acknowledges the "constitutive power" of historical connections to space, movement, and changing circumstances (Woodward 329). In fact, it is through such experience (change of residence and circumstance) that humans actively negotiate a sense of membership in the collective. It is through disharmony, conflict, and the hope for resolution and acceptance that connection—albeit briefly—occurs.

*Movement* is perhaps the most important concept for an application of diaspora to a non-essentialist notion of identity formation because it underscores the idea that identity is never stable, but rather always in flux, nomadic.

Cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark. It is not a once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return. Of course, it is not a mere phantasm either. It is *something*—not a mere trick of the imagination. It has its histories—and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual ‘past’, since our relation to it, like the child’s relation to the mother, is always-already ‘after the break’. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth. (Hall “Cultural identity and diaspora” 230)

Can an understanding of diaspora inform identity negotiation on smaller scales, though? In the most recent literature on diaspora as it pertains to identity negotiation, the concept is almost exclusively associated with large classes of people over an enduring period of time (i.e., Hall’s in-depth examination of Caribbean culture and black diaspora and Erving Goffman’s research on gender and the body). But what if the groups of people involved are small—community members in a mid-sized town, for example. What if “displacement” is temporary? Can exile still occur if the people in question are merely moving across the alley? Cultural identity for Hall and others has, for the most part, been relegated to discussions of large groups of people. Woodward, Grossberg, Hall, Norris, Kevin Hetherington, and others focus on the cultures of gender, race, popular art, slavery, and religion to examine identity. I think, however, that diaspora can also inform smaller groups—*community* identity negotiation—if the circumstances involve physical and social displacement. This movement and conflict can indeed affect a community’s sense of self, because regardless of the size of the group examined, identities are always constituted through historical and discursive practices. It is the researcher’s challenge, then, to tap into that relational network Woodward talks about and to understand how people are represented in particularized settings.

In his book *Identity: community, culture, difference*, Jonathan Rutherford notes that identity “marks the conjuncture of our past with the social, cultural, and

economic relations we live in now" (19). It would seem, then, that perhaps the most significant challenge researchers face is in accessing and understanding when and how that point of conjuncture occurs.

My interest in this dissertation is with the nature of community identities and how they are created and articulated as part of a larger process of negotiating some sort of social change. Drawing on the concepts of difference, diaspora, and processes of representation, I will examine specific discursive practices that reflected how residents in a northeastern Pennsylvania city sought to rearticulate that community's identity. I will also examine how the dynamic processes of negotiating community identity through rhetorical practices impacted (and were impacted by) environment, history, and ethics to create shared meaning. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to offer particularized description and explanation of the social practices and discourse throughout specific circumstances as they pertain to negotiating a communal sense of self. In the remainder of this chapter I will define some of the key terms and issues pertinent to my examination of identity formation.

### **What is Community?**

Community is a somewhat loaded term, as we have seen in the field of rhetoric alone. So to begin this investigation into identity it is imperative to restrict the parameters of what I mean by "community." *Discourse* communities. *Community literacy*. *Learning* communities. *Special interest* communities. *Communities of culture*. Over the past two decades, scholars have widely explored these terms in articles published in the field's leading journals (*College English*, *CCC*, *JBTC*, *JAC*).. All uses of the term "community" connote something slightly different, but all are unified in the most basic way by the concept of "collectivity," or bringing individuals together within a specific context, be that a shared goal, a similar need, specialized knowledge, or even the same space (i.e., a classroom).

My use of the term community is broad in the sense that I am most interested in those communities in which we take up residence—our towns, villages, cities that we call "home." Clearly, within any city, multiple cultures co-exist—varying religious cultures, professional cultures, political cultures, ethnic cultures. However,

often we find members of disparate groups converge (or actively forge links as members of several groups) in an effort to better circumstances—political, social, economic, ecologic—or make a location more livable. It is not geography *per se* that binds people, or creates a collective. People are motivated to interact with one another because of complex social, psychological, and physiological needs. However, location does serve as an initial commonality, an initial identifier.

Benedict Anderson offers the notion of “imagining” which I also build into my definition of community. In his book *Imagined Communities*, Anderson defines the concept of nation:

It is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will not know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations...It is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (6-7)

While Anderson’s definition of nation is designed to acknowledge whole countries, there is much that can be applied to the smaller scope of community as it is relevant to the city or town. First, while residents of a city the size of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, are certainly likely to know other community members professionally and personally, it is still highly unlikely they will know any more than a mere fraction of the population. But because of their own identification with the location and history of the place, residents will indeed imagine the rest of the population and how they individually fit within the collective. Community members position themselves—usually juxtaposed with other residents or members—as they see their roles and their history as people who have chosen to live and share a specific space. While Anderson’s argument pertains exclusively to *nations*, the concept of imagining also works at the local level.

Second, Anderson argues that nations are imagined as both limited and sovereign. Cities and towns also must acknowledge the limitation of physical

boundaries and “turf.” For example, I have been a resident of the Wyoming Valley now for four years, and while I teach in Wilkes-Barre, I live in the Back Mountain (eight miles up the side of a mountain) in a community called Dallas. While the actual boundary or division between Dallas and its immediate neighbor, Shavertown, is fuzzy (few residents can tell you where the line actually is), people certainly identify themselves and each other according to what town they actually reside in. While physical boundaries can be fluid and changing, they define limits—and they provide community members with a finite sense of physical self.

Anderson’s notion of sovereignty is perhaps more difficult to apply at the local level. Anderson argues that nations imagine themselves sovereign because the concept of freedom allows for self-determination in response to all social, political, economic influences, whether those influences come from within or outside the nation. On a much smaller scale, I believe this concept can be localized. In the Wyoming Valley, as I will illustrate, the physical area is actually densely populated, while each of the major cities themselves are not considered major metropolitan areas. Of the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton/Hazleton metropolitan statistical area, Scranton claims approximately 76,000; Wilkes-Barre claims slightly more than 47,000; and Hazleton claims just under 26,000. Linking all three of these cities in the Wyoming Valley, we find many small villages, boroughs, townships, and towns. While all are connected physically and in many ways economically and socially, each community seeks to establish its independence and uniqueness. City governments fight to maintain the freedom to determine their own zoning laws, for example, separate from the neighboring communities, and separate certainly from the larger cities around them. To lose such autonomy is to lose the freedom to determine all manner of issues related to community life.

Finally, Anderson argues that nations are imagined *communities* inasmuch as people feel bound to one another and identify one another as kinsmen, regardless of the social, political, and economic divisions between them. If we apply this notion to the United States, we can certainly see evidence of a strong sense of *community* among natives. In spite of huge chasms between socio-economic classes, social status, political, racial, and even physical differences, most nationalists see Americans as a united front even though the reality is often quite different. At the



local level, this is perhaps even more the case. Bound by place, history and circumstance, city residents see themselves as part of a whole. Even if they are not born in the community, as they reside there, they vote in local elections, shop in local businesses, purchase and maintain homes locally, all suggesting not only emotional stake, but also *purposeful insertion* into the collective. While the idea of defending one's city from siege in the United States has not been an issue since the Civil War, were attack to come, most city residents would rally and band together in its defense. Not to belabor the example too much, but we witnessed evidence of this community identification when New York was attacked on September 11, 2001. When the attack occurred, and certainly for many weeks after, New Yorkers seemed to take great pride in identifying themselves as such and by seeing the community as one unified front.

In his book *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics*, Kevin Hetherington notes,

being a part of a separate and distinct community has been an important means of establishing forms of identification with others. As well as belonging to some form of grouping, however, this sense of community and location has also carried with it symbolic attachments to particular places...Spaces, sometimes deliberately, other times more arbitrarily chosen, come to have symbolic attachments to them that give them a social centrality for a particular group. A sense of belonging and community may come to be ordered around the social centrality of particular places (72).

Drawing from these ideas of space and imagined communities, I have looked specifically to community-as-place to focus my inquiry. Cities or towns, those spaces we refer to as home, serve as a spatial link to the social groupings we ultimately form. It seems a logical starting point for my understanding of community as a result. It is important to note, however, that physical space is inextricably linked to experience—the “symbolic attachments” Hetherington acknowledges above. While I have chosen to begin from a notion of geography, that concept itself is a loaded one. Place inevitably has history. History is configured and interpreted by humans. Humans act, react, and communicate about circumstance. While place initiates my examination of community, those other links will certainly be important to the full discussion of it. This starting space for an

understanding of community is by no means complete. In fact, the term “community” is quite slippery—much of our understanding is bound up in experience, discipline, even political and social agendas. Thus, my use of the term is not without potential problems and may, in fact, be somewhat contested. I argue that this is at least in part because *community* seems to matter to people. In a wide variety of disciplines it has been the site of much debate and struggle.

It is also important for my purposes to distinguish between *culture* and *community*. Much of the literature on identity begins from the premise of examining various cultures. Cultures are the dynamic, always changing perspectives of people brought together by space, history, language, and often shared values such as spirituality or relationship with nature. But for the most part, cultural studies theorists take a wide-lens approach to such examination, and choose broadly defined groups (i.e., women, slaves and slave owners, or religious sects) or entire nations (i.e., this may be best understood in places caught up in social/political upheaval such as the Balkans, Israel/Palestine, or Chechnya/Russia). Such studies are indeed important to understanding identity. I seek, however, to delimit my discussion to a single American community—a city of under 50,000—because I think it’s useful to privilege the small stories. The two terms “community” and “culture” are certainly inherent within each other, but I see community in this instance as smaller and more place-bound than is the classification of culture. You can have culture without space, but you can’t say the same for community.

### **The Problem of “Community” in a Postmodern World**

When Jean-François Lyotard (1984) characterized postmodernism as “an incredulity toward metanarratives,” in effect he sought to delegitimize those broad, interpretive narratives that perpetuated the myth of “Truth” for all—claims of universal knowledge which had historically been privileged in most academic circles (i.e., “humanity as the hero of liberty”) (5). Lyotard, Foucault, and others (i.e., Jameson, 1981, 1991; Harvey, 1990; Lyon, 1994; and Zukin, 1992) encouraged instead a privileging of more fragmented, particularized ways of knowing. Ihab Hassan describes the two central, constitutive tendencies in postmodernism as

"indeterminance" and "immanence." (92) Certainly with respect to the un-doing of metanarratives, Hassan's notion of "indeterminance" is key, in that it simultaneously favors a deconstruction of existing Western discourse and the re-creation of a fragmented, pluralistic perspective.

By indeterminacy, or better still, indeterminacies, I mean a complex referent that these diverse concepts help to delineate: ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt, perversion, deformation. The latter alone subsumes a dozen current terms of unmaking: decreation, disintegration, deconstruction, decenterment, displacement, difference, discontinuity, disjunction...Through all these signs moves a vast will to unmaking... (92)

Similarly, Lyotard's term, the *petit recit*—or the small story—argued for the individualized experience as the key to our understanding of the world. As a result, those theorists and practitioners who subsequently ascribed to postmodernist notions called into question the very existence of community at all. According to James Mackin, "Lyotard rejects the possibility of communality in favor of nihilistic fragmentation."

Through this privileging of fragmented, individualized knowledges, postmodernism has undermined our faith in a collective sense of self. For postmodernists, that which suggests anything "collective" has the potential to draw on some generalized knowledge claim. As a result, in the denunciation of all meta-narratives and claims of universality, postmodernists have made *community identity* as well as *community ethic* if not impossible, certainly problematic concepts. If identity exists, it is necessarily a compilation of various fragments, individualized experiences and perceptions of reality that are constantly in flux. In the postmodern view, if a sense of the collective—a sense of community identity—exists at all, it is born of the moment and serves only individual needs.

A study of community is inherently messy and a difficult journey on which to embark. Not only does "community" seemingly conflict with the postmodern nihilism Mackin assigns to the movement, but if it *does* exist, its boundaries and impermanence seem impossible to negotiate. As a result, cultural studies theorists Laurie Anne Whitt and Jennifer Daryl Slack argue in their article "Communities, Environments and Cultural Studies" (1994) that more careful examination of

community and its relationship to environment offers not only an important challenge for the field, but is also necessary for a “new context for some old issues.” They posit that the apparent academic avoidance of community is at least partly due to a new form of PMS.

Cultural theorists tend to be blinkered by the prevailing intellectual community—predominantly urban, generally privileged, arrantly ‘academic’, and widely smitten with PostModern Syndrome. And it is perhaps this which best explains certain omissions in the cultural studies agenda: the neglect of community, the ‘overlooking’ of the environment, and the lack of concerted attempts to responsibly reconfigure community/environment relationships...There is compelling reason to redirect and enhance our vision and commitments. What we stand to lose is largely unreflective narrowness. (26)

Though estrogen-driven PMS doesn’t result in “unreflective narrowness” (at least not in the literal sense), it frequently results in moodiness and backaches. PostModern Syndrome PMS carries with it the same possible effects in its loud and long whine to abandon the “we” in favor of the “I.” What has resulted, at least in some instances, is a pervasive lack of confidence that we can truly know anything for anything longer than a moment or two.

Ironically, much of the postmodern rejection of community has come from feminist strands of discussion in cultural studies and rhetorical theory. For some feminist theorists, an understanding of community must include an acknowledgement (and subsequent rejection) of the latter half of the word—*unity*. If unity is inherent in community, such accord is almost always born of minority domination, exclusion, and unrealistic expectations of social, economic, political, and aesthetic conformity (Rakow, 1986; Cirkseña, 1987; Altman, 1987; Lubiano, 1992). According to Whitt and Slack, “Community based on a notion of unity in sameness promotes sexism, racism, classism or some variant thereof based on the imagined threat of some ‘alien’ otherness” (13).

Other threads of postmodern discussion concerning community have sought to redefine the term’s parameters. For Whitt and Slack, the primary motivation in postmodern re-seeing of community is to underscore the importance of difference and struggle at the local level. The goal is to get as far away as possible from a false sense of equalization (which happens only through manipulation and public

message control) that might occur through an emphasis on *sameness*, which many postmodernists claim is inherent within *community*. "The critique works to make space within postmodernism, within the rejection of a *unity of sameness*, for talking about a *unity in difference*" (emphasis mine 13-14). This privileging of difference is born out of a pervasive "skepticism" of the meta-narrative, the abandonment of the collective. Unity suggests some sort of monolithic truth for all, and postmodernists reject such a concept out of hand. Thus, perhaps the only community that is possible in a postmodern world is one that does not overtly recognize itself as such. Whitt and Slack pose an important question to this end when they ask, "Can there be community where there is neither recognition nor awareness of community—in the absence, that is, of a 'sense of community'?" (16) Their answer appears to be a qualified yes.

The basis of community may be present—the fact of interconnectedness or interdependency, of commonality or mutuality of interests—but those bound together by these relations of significance may or may not recognize them as such; they may not perceive them *as* significant. (17)

Such a position deviates from the postmodernist stance in that it suggests not only in fact is community *real*, whether it is perceived by all members as such or not, but also allows for the possibility of locating connections in research. One of the biggest problems with the postmodern attempt to revise the term community is that it creates what I believe are false dichotomies. I do not argue with the fact that postmodernism has been a useful avenue for academics to pursue; it certainly has. However, its almost exclusive attention to fragmentation has also led to a potentially damaging reductionist notion that community necessarily connotes uniformity, essentialism, unity, and/or homogeneous, *Gemeinschaft* over *Gesellschaft*.

The debate about the usefulness of community—its definition(s) and whether to see the concept as pertinent to our experience—is not exclusive to the academic disciplines of cultural studies or rhetoric. Sociology and political science have also recently both wrestled with the concept. In his comprehensive examination of political perspectives of community, Robert Booth Fowler attributes the skepticism of community to the political trend of "liberal individualism" in the United States.

In many respects, he equates the liberal ideal with capitalism in general—the privileging of the individual pay-offs over the attention to earning and giving back to others. However, he also equates the liberal individualist trend to intellectualism and the privileging of separate identities. He points to Transcendentalism (and specifically its most influential spokesmen, Emerson and Thoreau) as one example of intellectual/social separation—proffering the importance of individual thought and advancement over the collective. (31)

Liberalism not only neglects our need for community, indeed it is often downright hostile to it. It impedes thinking in terms of community. The issue is conceptual: Thus, honest liberals such as Nancy Rosenblum acknowledge 'the communitarian failings of liberal thought' as a given. (Fowler 15)

However, despite a lengthy overview of what seems like almost complete abandonment of the concept of community, Fowler suggests that there are indeed important pockets of inquiry into community and its purposes for American intellectuals.

Thus we are not, on the whole, dealing with communitarian intellectuals who are either particularly discouraged or radical. They describe a crisis or rather many crises and agree that community is not a hegemonic idea in American culture and, sometimes, that it has never been. Yet some of them find within the American historical experience both intellectual and experiential resources to advance the idea of community. (37)

Fowler offers six "intellectual and experiential resources" of his own for recognizing trends toward new understandings of community and means by which we may overcome intellectualism and liberalism and the falsehood of the communitarian ideal. Five of the six resources are in some respects merely organizing patterns and really offer little new in terms of understanding potential for community (community as participatory democracy; republicanism—privileging of the public sense of community; realm of roots—tradition/family; global communities; and religious communities). However, the sixth is almost an agnostic view of community. Effectively, Fowler argues we know something is out there; we're just not really sure what it is or if it's even really attainable. Fowler calls this category the "existential community" that recognizes the social ideal of community while also acknowledging that it remains "permanently elusive" (40-41).

Fowler's existential community seems to come perhaps closest to recognizing the impermanence of *any* identity, and hence, is truest to my argument for the constant negotiation and articulation of such reality. However, I break with Fowler's notion that community is permanently elusive, in that I think we can conceptualize—even in the moment—and agree upon what community is; it's just that that concept does not, cannot remain a stable force. Fowler notes that "Community is not a place or a thing; it is a calling, a struggle, a journey...its form is not obvious now nor will it be tomorrow" (161). It is indeed a struggle—but through that struggle, I believe we come to something substantive, even if impermanent.

A pragmatic view of social practice seems to challenge postmodern skepticism of the collective identity. We settle in geographic clusters. We organize in political, professional, social, religious, and familial clans. We identify issues and concerns for maintaining a healthy and productive way of life through public fora (the use of the media, public meetings) and private exchanges. Closer to home, look, for example, at the call for proposals for the 2002 Conference on College Composition and Communication. John Lovas notes, "We seek community—a place, a space, a quality—in our classrooms, our departments, our institutions, and our professional organization." The theme for this conference was "connecting the text and the streets," at least in part a nod to the importance of *community* and *connection*. In the field's research over the past decade we have openly celebrated the individualized stories and voices that comprise our profession and our classrooms. We have called into question generalized claims of knowledge in favor of more fragmented, temporary connections. But in practice we also simultaneously gravitate toward a recognition of the collective sense of self—albeit one that is dynamic and unstable. While the individualized stories resonate with small "t" truths, the reason they work for us is because we actively seek some sort of connection with them. It is in this act of connection it becomes clear that our goals are purposive and *social*. Community, and the need for it, drives us to find the "truth" even in particularized, small stories.

Indeed, Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that it is only in social clusters that signification can occur and meaning can be made. Ideologies are formed only in the

*exchange* of signs or symbols, and while they are certainly not fixed, community members (participants in the exchange) seek some sort of shared meaning, even if that meaning is that they cannot understand one another.

The 'we-experience' is not by any means a nebulous herd experience; it is differentiated. Moreover, ideological differentiation, the growth of consciousness, is in direct proportion to the firmness and reliability of the social orientation. The stronger, the more organized, the more differentiated the collective in which an individual orients himself, the more vivid and complex his inner world will be. (Bakhtin 934)

The concept of "differentiation" that Bakhtin relies on here hearkens back to *différance* and sites of struggle that seem to be key to at least recognizing potential for the collective. While we may gravitate to communities, it is in those sites of struggle, differentiation, when identity is temporarily negotiated and forged.

Can the privileging of particularized knowledges, pervasive skepticism, and the individual *petit récit* of postmodernism co-exist with the "we-experience" and what James Mackin calls "communitarianism," or reliance on a system of ethical social connections? I believe it can, and does, through the negotiation of community identity. As social humans, *community* is a concept intrinsic to who we are. While our understanding of community seems in constant flux, the notion of a *collective* can never wholly be dismissed. How then do we bridge the gap between the postmodern resistance to metanarratives and collectivity and the efforts within our communities to define a collective sense of self?

My answer to that question lies in the dynamic process community members go through in coming to their definitions of community identity. When are connections forged, and can they be made through differences as well as similarities? Must those differences necessarily even be acknowledged by both (all) sides in order for connection to occur? Is "disconnection" part of the process of negotiation, and if so, how? What knowledges/perceptions of community are privileged, and how do we see evidence of those in public and private transcripts? We are challenged, therefore, to investigate how connections occur in specific incidences and to how a collective sense of self may emerge through those moments.



### **Ethical Reciprocity and Articulation**

In response to the tension born of postmodern skepticism and social need for collectivity, James Mackin's ecological approach assumes a stance of ethical reciprocity. He notes,

This broad principle allows for the fragmentation and diversity that postmodernism illustrates while insisting upon the possibility of community...The general principle that a functioning ecosystem supports its constituent members and that its functioning members fill niches in the ecosystem provides a reciprocal ideal that transcends cultures while avoiding a dogmatic a priori definition of what should constitute the good for the individual or the culture in any given case (34, 72).

Mackin's ecological stance recognizes that language is just one semiotic system among many that constitutes our multifaceted relationship to the overall ecosystem that is our life support (71). However, to explore communicative strategies within specific contexts affords us better insight into the many different ways in which we forge social links and strive for the greater good for the collective.

Following Jacques Derrida's lead, Mackin contends, "We 'individuals' comprise subsystems of various kinds, some of which are unknown to us;" thus, the concepts of the individual and the collective are mutually dependent (32).

A community is a community only insofar as it is a system of individuals. Each term requires a trace of the other for its meaning. Neither is primary. Individualism privileges the single human being as the basic term, while communitarianism privileges the social group...Postmodernism has effectively attacked the primacy of the subject in humanism. (Mackin, 32)

To extend Mackin's argument, I contend that one key to the union between theories of postmodern individualism and the possibility of community lies in our understanding of how identity is shaped and articulated.

Articulation may be understood as both method and theory. For my purposes in this project, I will primarily look to articulation as a means (method) by which to analyze a social setting; however, it is also necessary to briefly examine the theory from which it springs to better understand why such an approach is useful. The two uses for the term are inextricable from one another.

### Marxist roots of articulation

Articulation emerged primarily from a Marxist tradition of thought. Thus, it makes sense to briefly examine the Marxist underpinnings of the concept. Classical Marxism relates the concept of class (and more specifically class consciousness) within economic structure. A class is determined by the relations of its members to the means of production, and Marx saw the working class as the revolutionary class (proletariat) because of how workers configured and effected production. For Marx, class consciousness deeply affected knowledge-making and human interaction with the "state." Marx regarded the state as the means by which the ruling class maintained its rule over the proletariat.

In the most simplistic terms, classical Marxist thought recognizes that the proletariat (the working class) is engaged in continuous class struggle against the bourgeoisie (the elite). The bourgeoisie works to dominate and control the working class for economic, social and political reasons, and the struggle leads to efforts by the proletariat for emancipation. According to Marx, emancipation eventually leads to proletariat control over production and ultimately economic, social, and political autonomy (defeat of the bourgeoisie agenda). This struggle represents how Marx understood the struggle between Capitalism and Socialism. It is not social consciousness that determines social being, but social being that determines social consciousness (Marx 84). Thus, to define any science, philosophy, theory, or ideology one must first understand the "social being" that constitutes it. Marx's notion of the "social being" as I understand it represents not only the social nature of the individual, but also the concept of *being* which denotes direct application to lived experience. Marx favored the idea that theory must be applied; critical thinking must give way to action.

Marx's philosophy (widely discussed as a science) has been co-opted and applied in thousands of ways across disciplines. Louis Althusser is among those who have actively reinterpreted classical Marxism; in Althusser's case, the reworking is an attempt to apply the basic premises of Marxism to modern structuralism. Stuart Hall argues that perhaps one of Althusser's greatest contributions in his reworking of Marxism is his attention to the importance of complex structures as they pertain to an understanding of ideologies. Althusser's

structuralist application of Marxism “emphasizes the complexity of and contradictions within the social formation, conceptualized as a structure of practices” (Grossberg and Slack “Introduction” 87). By “complexity” and “contradiction,” Althusser effectively privileges the notion of struggle and difference in cultural formation.

...Marx conceptualizes the ensemble of relations which make up a whole society—Marx’s ‘totality’—as essentially a complex structure, not a simple one. Hence, the relationship within that totality between its different levels—say, the economic, the political, and the ideological (as Althusser would have it)—cannot be a simple or immediate one. (Hall “Signification, Presentation, Ideology” 91)

This Althusserian structuralist interpretation of classical Marxism is one of two schools of thought that inform Hall’s explication of articulation. The other stems from culturalism, and Hall eventually advocates for a “middle ground” between the two. In his 1980 article, “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms,” Hall critically examined the two major philosophies that underpinned Marxist theory for the field of cultural studies.

Hall described the two major camps within Marxist cultural studies as ‘culturalism’ and ‘structuralism.’ The former...emphasizes the creativity of the cultural process and the active autonomy of human practices (often condensed in notions of Praxis); it places experience (ultimately class determined) as the epistemological source and political standard of the social formation as a totality. The latter, represented by Louis Althusser, emphasizes the complexity of and the contradictions within the social formation, conceptualized as a structure of practices. At different historical moments, different practices are ‘in dominance.’ Social agents, either individuals or classes, are seen as produced by different practices and, in this sense, as the bearers or supporters of this structure rather than its authors. (Grossberg and Slack “Introduction” 87-88).

The middle ground that Hall sought effectively recognizes the importance of the process of negotiation, that meaning is forged, albeit temporarily, and is informed by complex structures of history and social and ideological practices. Form or structure is never guaranteed, but is actively constructed through social interaction and interpretation. *Articulation* is a theoretical perspective developed largely by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), but the wider application and deeper examination of the concept comes from Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg.

The concept offers one way to access and analyze the myriad of linkages across community members' experiences and contexts.

Grossberg asserts that articulation develops out of an "interpretation of Marx's statement that 'people make history but in conditions not of their own making'" (Grossberg "Formations" 50-1). Effectively, articulation denies the essential human subject—nothing and no one is stable or unchanging. All human agents impact contexts and ultimately are impacted by those contexts (a notion certainly consistent with Mackin's concept of reciprocity). Identity, therefore, is dynamic, historic, constantly negotiated.

Articulation refers to the ongoing construction of unstable (to varying degrees) relations between practices and structures. It involves the production of contexts, the ongoing effort by which particular practices are removed from and inserted into different structures of relationships, the construction of one set of relations out of another, the continuous struggle to reposition practices within a shifting field of forces. (Grossberg "Formations" 51)

What we gain by understanding specific *practices* as they are produced and juxtaposed against one another is insight into the active construction and interpretation of history. Applied to community identity, public practices will conflict and it is in this struggle that identity is temporarily forged.

### **Articulation and forging temporary links**

In his 1986 interview with Lawrence Grossberg, Stuart Hall offers some insight into the English understanding of term "articulation" that help to clarify its application. Hall notes, "In England, the term has a nice double meaning because 'articulate' means to utter, to speak forth...Be we also speak of an 'articulated' lorry (truck): a lorry where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another ("On Postmodernism and Articulation" 1986, 53). In this brief explanation of the word, we see the importance of "utterances" or the physical act of communication, as well as "linkages" those circumstances that compel disparate parts, functions, or characteristics to come together, though perhaps not indefinitely. We note that with the two parts of the lorry Hall describes, they seem to be separate but equal; they can stand alone or work together. In either

case, the truck is rearticulated according to how it is configured. Hall's primary point seems to lie in the fact that meaning—indeed whatever we perceive in a given circumstance—is constructed of different parts and interpreted according to circumstance in an ever-changing environment.

Articulation is thus the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time...the theory of articulation asks how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how the subject thinks the necessary inevitable thoughts which belong to it; it enables us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling them to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socio-economic or class location or social position. (Hall "On Postmodernism and Articulation" 53)

We can apply this to a less physically substantive subject than the lorry to see how the concept might work socially. Hall himself does it in his examination of diaspora and what it is to be "black" in his native Jamaica. One way to understand articulation is to examine anything in lived experience for which we can identify "links" that temporarily fix and alter the meaning of the subject based on particularized settings and circumstances. These links, while not necessary (as the two parts of the lorry may be understood separately), are also purposive in their attachment and born out of some sort of negotiation or struggle—social, economic, political, emotional, even physical or spatial.

For example, health care has long been a concept humans have articulated and rearticulated throughout our history. Prior to what we now term modern medical science discoveries, health care was linked with spirituality and the concept of a "clean soul." The Christian Bible, for example, highlights numerous examples of people who suffered from what we know now to be epileptic seizures, and were widely regarded as people with demonic possessions. Medical doctors sought to "cast out" the spirit, sometimes through praying, sometimes with the use of complex oils and herb concoctions. The link at that time, certainly across many cultures and beyond Christianity, was a purposive connection between health and the "healing arts" with spirituality. Often, "healers" were spiritual guides even before they were considered "doctors." In Native American culture, this was also the case. For the Navajo tribe, for example, illness was regarded as the result of some sort of

disruption to the body's natural energies and spiritual wholeness. Anything from a lightning strike close to the tribe's physical location to a violation of tribe law to spiritual possession or visitation from ghosts could be attributed to illness. Healers were considered among the most spiritual members of the tribe, and the healing process combined medicinal appeals (with the use of diet modification or medicines derived from herbs and plants) with spiritual healing not unlike that described in numerous religious texts. This unity between spirituality and health care is seen as temporary, not because it did not endure for many years, but because other linkages have been forged and seen as dominant in specific cultures over time.

As more discoveries were made in medical sciences, the link between health care and science became dominant, especially in Western culture. In the U.S., for example, the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought discoveries in antibiotic treatments for hundreds of illnesses that had killed people in our history. We discovered—through rigorous testing and empirical research—the scientific reasons for the importance of certain vitamins, the impact of alcohol use and abuse, drug interaction with the system, and even the difference between safe and unsafe sexual practices. As more scientific inquiry evolved and was eventually reported, science and health care were linked in a different articulation.

Interestingly, while spirituality and science have certainly struggled for dominance in the articulation of health care, they do frequently overlap. In American culture, for example, while preventative care, medicinal (chemical) treatment, and/or invasive procedures (surgical means) are widely regarded as traditional practices; the U.S. has seen a resurgence of popularity in alternative health care which includes (but is not limited to): folk medicine, herbal medicine, midwifery, homeopathy, faith healing, New Age healing, acupuncture, naturopathy, massage, and aroma therapy. Currently, there appears to be an overlap—perhaps blending is the better term here—between the spiritual and scientific articulations of health care.

Finally, while this is certainly more evident in the U.S. than perhaps anywhere else in the world, economics are enmeshed in struggle for dominance in the articulation of health care. In the advent of malpractice lawsuits, skyrocketing insurance costs, prescription drug costs, an aging population, HMOs, and almost

daily discoveries about humankind's physiological and emotional interaction with the ever-changing environment, politicians on Capitol Hill cannot discuss health care as a concept without first invoking the dollars and cents bottom line. It is also interesting to watch how the articulation of health care as economic issue may, in fact, drive and inform (temporarily link) with the spiritual and scientific threads. As a consumer, I have been driven to several different homeopathic and spiritually-based techniques for both preventative care and treatment simply because of how the health care industry is articulated and linked with economics currently. At least in part because of the threads of public discussion during the most recent Presidential campaign, it became clear to me just how many health care decisions are made based almost entirely on economics, which for me is disconcerting. How are these threads ultimately communicated and negotiated? In the broad sense of public negotiation many of the messages, images, associations, and questions emerge via the media. In a quick survey of online archives for leading news magazines and media outlets I found the following:

| <b>Media Outlet</b>                 | <b>References between January 2000 and June 2002 to "health care"</b> | <b>References between January 2000 and June 2002 to "health care &amp; economics"</b> |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| <i>Time Magazine</i>                | 1075  | 62  |
| <i>New York Times</i>               | 31,705  | 81  |
| <i>Newsweek</i>                     | 443   | 24  |
| <i>U.S. News &amp; World Report</i> | 122   | 3   |
| CNN.com                             | 1005  | *unable to calculate  |

While this by no means fully illustrates the mass communication outlets, it does offer some insight into the frequency with which health care is mentioned and in what articulations. We don't begin to see, however, political discussions/speeches/debates, education (both formal and informal) efforts, or marketing efforts in this small survey. Clearly, because our country is so saturated

with instant messaging capabilities, there is no way to fully quantify or qualify the hundreds of thousands of efforts to articulate and rearticulate this concept. But at the very least we can see health care, and even health care and economics, as recurring ideas foregrounded by the media, politicians, and eventually by the consumers of those messages. But if quantifying the frequency of the message isn't enough to understand how an articulation emerges, then how do we gauge links and understand the negotiation process? I believe we do so only in particularized settings by looking for overlap and difference among specific messages.

Clearly, my example of the articulation of health care in the U.S. is a simplification of articulation as a theory, in that it offers a very broad sweep of message themes over time. If we look at articulation as a means of analysis, the key lies in accessing and understanding the negotiation, the struggle which occurs in the moment. But it is useful to understand the different impulses that drive new linkages not only to form, but to even temporarily achieve dominance. Did the scientific link with health care gain dominance when Jonas Salk discovered the vaccine for polio? Or when penicillin and its myriad uses were discovered? Did the re-emergence of spiritual associations with health care emerge after Elizabeth Kübler Ross published *On Death and Dying*? Or when the Beatles met with the Dalai Lama? Did economics link with health care when the first malpractice lawsuit was filed? Or when doctors began accepting only money as payment for their services (instead of eggs and bread)? Each of these moments and hundreds of thousands of others are worthy of examination as points of struggle, moments at which questions were put to the public and people negotiated and internalized those links. And we can see struggle as simply as we understand the irritation that small bits of sand cause an oyster. From that irritation (which we can translate as simply questions or new ideas), a brand new substance begins to form inside the oyster.

Thus, if we apply this idea to identity, we must acknowledge its instability, and simultaneously acknowledge the human effort to forge links across social contexts. We therefore forge community identity, albeit temporarily, in the dynamic *process* of public and private exchange. But the question becomes *how* we identify those moments. In practice, how does the process of articulation unfold? Is it identifiable? And why is it useful to understand such practices in the midst of some



sort of social change? Hall argues that to understand articulation is also to be able to actively construct and ultimately effect the social milieu in an ethical, progressive way.

The aim of a theoretically-informed political practice must surely be to bring about or construct the articulation between social or economic forces and those forms of politics and ideology which might lead them in practice to intervene in history in a progressive way—an articulation which has to be *constructed* through practice precisely because it is not guaranteed by how those forces are constituted in the first place. (Hall “Signification, Representation, Ideology” 95)

As Hall suggests, “Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture *in the process of becoming*, rather than of being.” [emphasis mine] It is thus the *process* of articulation—that complex drawing together of experience, perception, context, and communication—that offers the possibility of collectivity.

### Identifying links across public practices

It is this process of becoming that my study of community identity aims to explore. Using the concept of articulation, I believe we can begin to understand what links occur in order for a community to accept, albeit temporarily, some agreed-upon notion of collective self as that sense relates to the environment from which it emerges. I have therefore identified some characteristics of articulations that help us to better understand the process of becoming as it pertains to community. These characteristics will serve as the primary means of analysis in the case in chapter 3.

- Practices that pertain to the articulation of identity must be uttered or communicated in some sort of public sphere. I will refer to these messages as **public practices**. While utterances may certainly occur privately (we may, for example, utter some disparaging remark under our breath about the quality of the sandwich we receive at a restaurant, but the comment—and apparently the sandwich—is not intended for public consumption), the practices that have resonance in identity negotiation are public and must be made available

to receivers beyond the sender. In the case of identity negotiation amidst social change, those utterances must in some capacity be *shared*, intended for some level of public scrutiny. I grant as well that some spaces are more public than others. In some cases, ideas are communicated via public forum such as a newspaper column, and therefore are more accessible to a broader range of responses. In others, ideas are exchanged only between two individuals in conversation, or among a handful of people at a bar. Interestingly, while those engaged in conversation in the back yard or at the bar, may see their interaction as “private,” in reality, because ideas are shared, they become public. While the bar is public space, it is also simultaneously viewed as private space, if people seek to talk in a back booth, for example. The space in this case is much less important than the act of exchange itself. Regardless, the practice must have some potential for public consumption in order for it to have impact on the articulation of community identity. As Mackin notes, “Not all discourse has important public consequences, but all levels of discourse potentially have public consequences at some level of community” (192). While it is important to acknowledge that the inward/internal struggle occurs in human thinking, and certainly it has impact on action and reaction, it is only the *public* or sharing of that struggle that we can feasibly analyze.

- Practices must introduce some **difference** or struggle to the existing reality. It is in difference that negotiation occurs, whether that is the negotiation of the meaning of a single word, reaction to an occurrence, or verbalization of a specific perception. Any struggle is a fruitful field for examining discursive practices as they inform articulation of identity. Notably, those engaged in the message formation, representation and interpretation need not recognize the struggle as struggle.
- Practices will have **implications for both the “I” and the “we”**. While the pronouns need not be uttered or even inferred, the practice in question must be situated in the moment, informed by *shared* (if not acknowledged)

history, and have implications for the individual as well as others. This point merely maintains that participants in the practices must acknowledge on some level that there *is* a collective, a social implication as well as an individual condition. This issue raises the importance of agency. As Vincent M. Colapietro acknowledges, "Concreteness requires an appeal to history, to our actual and historical situatedness and...an exploration of a complex, tangled past. It is, however, only in detailed reference to our concrete historical circumstances that we can catch a glimpse of our uniqueness as well as our universality, of what is distinctive about our agency at this moment in history and what we share in common with our predecessors" (424). With agency, it is also important to acknowledge the difference between *purposive action*, that is, individuals who knowingly set out to persuade or alter the perception of given idea, and *unwitting reaction*, that is, individuals who respond with less at stake or less insight into the circumstances. Again, according to Colapietro, "Human agency resides primarily in the capacity to conceive and to realize purposes" (435).

- Practices will often have more impact if they involve people who are perceived to have **power** in the situation at hand. In the truest Marxist tradition, those without perceived power may indeed have impact in any given situation. But if the goal is to affect an articulation—the struggle for dominance in any given link—it requires much more organization and greater numbers for those without power to assume it. Power may be assessed in a number of ways, but I have purposely avoided its location in agency. I see power as situated in circumstance. While agency plays a role in this, certainly, it is not the sole determinant in social control. Thus, an assessment of power must incorporate both agency and historical situatedness. First, if a speaker or participant in an exchange has the ability to control outcome or is directly affected by action that may result from the exchange, his or her power quotient is higher than someone less involved or who is only indirectly affected by the circumstances. This does not assume, however that the person less directly involved has *no* power or does not affect

the scene. As Andrew Kernohan argues, "The existence of power of one person over another is a social fact, not a material one; people do not have power because of some intrinsic property of themselves, but because of social relations in which they are embedded" (726). If social power exists, it exists in the social conditions of the moment. Second, if the exchange/negotiation takes place in a more public forum (for example, if the negotiation is published with the potential for many readers, or aired on television with the potential for many viewers, or occurs in a well-attended meeting), the potential for impact is enhanced. Thus, those who control the message in a given moment may see their power quotient rise.

How then might articulations of community identity be illustrated in a particularized setting? To begin, I must acknowledge that there is no way to show the "full story." I say this in part because I don't believe there is a full story. There are many stories, many configurations, many iterations. And, as I have so often argued in this chapter, nothing is ever permanent or fixed. Thus, my case will offer *one* way of looking at some of the links that occurred in this setting at specific points in time.

Second, my work will illustrate what I think is a collage of stories, some of which connect and overlap, some of which do not. I preface these stories of the strike with history (both of the area and of the strike), because what precedes a happening informs both the present and the future. The historical junctures I have incorporated seek to help contextualize references and specific reactions/attitudes/behaviors among the Wilkes-Barre residents; however, the history I offer is by no means complete. This collage (bricolage?) will illustrate and offer fertile ground for analysis using the characteristics of articulation practices I outline above. The stories are layered and occasionally uneven—a reflection of a narrative life, I suppose. The texture is rarely smooth and polished, which is as "true" to the fabric of the Wilkes-Barre narrative as I think one person can be. Finally, I plan to illustrate, using the characteristics I have outlined above for articulation, various points at which a community identity emerged in Wilkes-Barre.

## Methods

While it is perhaps a less conventional way to begin a section on *how* and *why* I did what I did in my research, I want first to start by acknowledging what this research is *not*. First, I do not call my study an ethnography, chiefly because of its scope. Through my reading of ethnographic studies, particularly those conducted in the fields of sociology and anthropology, I have come to recognize that the best of them require a longer and more complete immersion of the researcher into a given “culture” than what I have accomplished through my own data-gathering process (see for example, Elliot Liebow’s *Tally’s Corner*; Michael Bell’s *Childerly: Nature and Morality in a Country Village*; Robert Wolensky’s *Better Than Ever—the Flood Recovery Task Force*; and Alice McIntyre’s *Inner-city Kids: Adolescents Confront Life and Violence in an Urban Community*). Instead, I prefer to say that I have employed some ethnographic methods, such as observation, one-to-one interviews, reflexivity, and close analysis of a wide array of documents produced by community members. Also, in keeping with the most basic tenet of ethnographic research, my work does attempt to describe *folk* (community members) in their natural settings, though I would not call it a complete or even finished description.

I have also drawn from sociologists Orlando Fals-Borda (1998) and Peter Park, et. al (1993) in terms of developing a participatory research ethos that recognizes the importance of issues associated with the researcher-as-participant and the impact of the research process on knowledge-making. Contemporary theory on participatory research advocates an ethical imperative to reflect, value, and return community knowledge that is developed throughout the project. Again, as I hesitate to call this case study an ethnography, I also resist labeling my research as participatory action. While I did interact with community members in a variety of ways, and I believe that my written analysis of the case will endeavor to reflect specific situations with integrity and accuracy, an intentional participatory action research design would require that I initiate a discussion of how all of the participants might help shape the research process from its inception. I did not do this, in part, because the interpretation—after the fact—has largely been mine.

Michael Quinn Patton offers a theory of *methodological appropriateness* for judging methodological quality, which I think is useful here. He notes, "A paradigm of choices rejects methodological orthodoxy in favor of *methodological appropriateness*....The issue then becomes not whether one has uniformly adhered to prescribed canons of either logical-positivism or phenomenology but whether one has made sensible methods decisions given the purpose of inquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available...Situational responsiveness means designing a study that is appropriate for a specific inquiry situation" (39).

In keeping with Patton's notion of methodological appropriateness, my approach to research draws from a variety of philosophical and methodological perspectives and does not fit neatly in one category. I have drawn from Edmund Husserl's philosophical assumption that we can know only what we experience and that experience and interpretation are naturally, inextricably intertwined. This phenomenological perspective is certainly part of the philosophy that underpins my inquiry; I aim to access and analyze a part of the everyday human experience.

However, mine is not a phenomenological *study* in that I also reject some of the essentialist claims of phenomenology. Because I value the importance of context in interpreting meaning of any kind, I do not believe that an essential core of meaning may directly translate necessarily to other inquiries, other studies. In addition, I did not personally experience the strike in Wilkes-Barre. In fact, several people who spoke with me about Wilkes-Barre also did not walk the picket lines during the strike. But what they *knew* of the experience and of the community was important to my own understanding of what occurred and how I could look at it now a quarter of a century later. The phenomenological philosophy I apply to this study is that there are many *ways of knowing* through experience.

Similarly, while my interest in the field examines community—and perhaps more specifically, human perception and its relationship to the specific environment in which it occurs—I cannot comfortably call my dissertation one that rests exclusively in ecological terms. In most current research using an ecological methodology researchers observe and interpret, but they do not participate in the environment they study. I cannot claim that distance in my methods.

Perhaps the most obvious methodological “fit” for my work falls in the hermeneutic camp. Following Wilhelm Dilthey’s lead, my case certainly privileges calculated “interpretive guesswork” in formulating and understanding links within community. The constant construction of reality through interpretation emerges from questioning and probing the context(s) in which ideas are communicated. However, hermeneutic philosophy does not adequately address problems of power that emerge in the negotiation process, which I believe is important to establishing meaning, even if that meaning is temporary.

So, in my attempt to negotiate methodological appropriateness for this dissertation, I have used the elements of phenomenology, ecology, and hermeneutics that best address my purposes. But the cultural studies concept of *articulation* that I use to explain the active process of forging links to create meaning in specific contexts seems to draw together these foregrounding philosophies. I hesitate to call this notion a methodology, *per se*, however. I think cultural studies theorists would also resist that label, mostly because articulation is regarded not as a paradigm, but as *praxis* —a process by which meaning, albeit temporary, actively evolves. However, articulation does ultimately serve as the means by which I try to make sense of how community identity is negotiated in specific contexts; therefore, my use of it is methodological.

In my examination of a wide variety of narratives associated with the strike of 1978, I have found numerous links across artifacts and individual interviews that indicate an ongoing negotiation of community identity. My methods for determining these links are largely interpretive. I gathered and analyzed numerous print documents associated with the strike, most of which included newspaper accounts and editorials. In this research, largely conducted at the Wyoming Valley Historical Society library and through the archives of the newspapers in question, I sought stories directly associated with the strike, community members’ attitudes and feelings about the strike, and articles that highlighted related but separate issues (i.e., the 1993 closing of the family-owned *Sunday Independent* newspaper). I also incorporated observations made by community members in other books or published accounts. In my analysis I sought common language and experience, but also differences in interpretations of happenings.

In addition to the print accounts, I formally interviewed twelve community members who either participated in or were directly affected by the strike in some way. I use the term “formally” because these interviews were specifically scheduled for the purposes of my research for this project. Readers will not find all of those voices in this text, because as my analysis ensued, I found some of the practices offered more interesting connections (and tensions) than others. With those formal interviews, I asked if I could tape record the conversations. Some community members had no problems with the tape recorder between us. Others asked me not to use it, and I didn’t. In all cases I took handwritten notes and reflected on certain stories and quotes that stood out for me at the end of the conversation, checking for accuracy. Because of my background in journalism (and the fact that I teach it now), I suspect the majority of these twelve saw me more as a reporter than as an academic, which I suspect neither helped nor hindered my credibility with them—in this community, to be a reporter or an academic can win you equal parts respect and distrust. In addition, there was one case where I conducted the interview in a restaurant (at the request of the participant), and the recording is sometimes of poor quality depending on the background noise. In all cases, I took detailed notes during and immediately after all interviews.

I should also note that while I have lived in the community, I have naturally established friendships with many area natives. The reason I distinguish the “formal” interviews above is because there were many times when in an informal situation, like a gathering of friends for a cookout, references to the strike or the flood or some other relevant community experience came up casually in conversation. Most of my friends knew I was researching Wilkes-Barre, but few actually knew of my specific interest. Some of the insight I garnered from these conversations was useful to my background, but I never chose to quote anyone directly from those situations, as I felt I would be stepping into murky ethical waters there.

While some community members I interviewed were very forthcoming and had no problem with me identifying them by name, others were nervous about public reaction to their comments, in part because of the still strong emotions associated with the long-running strike. As you will see in the case, there is



still—some 25 years after the strike—bad blood among neighbors on the issue. As a result, I promised those participants anonymity, and I offer only minimal identification so that they are as protected as possible. I treated my sources with the same courtesy that I would a news source for a story. I often went with prepared questions, but just as frequently, allowed those participants to free associate with stories of their own. In formal interviews lasted anywhere from 40 minutes to sometimes over three hours.

It is important, I think, to acknowledge my own researcher *ethos*. As much of the literature on qualitative methods reminds us, my presence as the researcher absolutely affected the field. At a very fundamental level, the very questions I asked led people to formulate ideas perhaps in a way they might not have in other circumstances (say, informally, over a beer at a local bar watching the World Series). In every interview situation, there was never any doubt of my purpose or of my role as the researcher. I never engaged in covert methods and was always careful to inform people of my purpose. Hence, regardless of my status as a Wilkes-Barre resident at the time, I was always, as Georg Simmel would call it, a *stranger*. I was a researcher (and to this working class town that often meant “academic,” “elite,” or simply “other”) and I was looking at *them* and what happened to *their community*.

I think what also made me a relative outsider in this research was that I had not been a Wilkes-Barre resident all of my life, or even most of my life. In fact, I hadn’t lived in the Wyoming Valley for two full years before I began to poke around the history of this strike. I had also not witnessed the strike itself, which made telling the stories to me, to some degree, I imagine, that much more “sport” for my participants. I don’t use that term to suggest that the people I spoke with intentionally fictionalized what happened. No, these people, by all indications, showed me great respect, seemed to have interest in the project, and were very earnest in what they offered. But time has a way of adding its own drama to any account, especially if you have to add enough detail so that an outsider can “experience” it after the fact. But this dissertation is not really about relating Truth. It’s about relating *some* perceptions of *some* truths and recognizing that nothing, not even accounts of actual happenings, can ever be definitively fixed in historical accounts.

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## Chapter 2

### **An Introduction to Wilkes-Barre and the Newspaper Strike of 1978**

My first view of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, occurred in March 1997 as my family and I drove a rented car in unfamiliar territory from our hotel located about three miles outside of the city. The hotel was located on the side of what I came to know later as Wilkes-Barre Mountain, but as strangers to the area who had arrived in the dark the previous night, we didn't know we were on a mountain until we began to descend down the winding highway.

When the city came into view, I was struck by two distinct geographical features: the river and the mountains. The Susquehanna River cuts a wide, meandering swath through the entire length of the valley, visually dividing the community in half. The area is densely settled along both sides of the river as far as the eye can see on either side of the highway (known as the Cross-valley). The Wyoming Valley area is located in the foothills of the Pocono Mountain range. In addition, various smaller ranges overlap along the river. But during our trip into the Valley on our first morning, I noticed only the two opposing mountains—Wilkes-Barre Mountain, the one from which we descended, and Back Mountain, the rise we drove toward on the other side of the Susquehanna. Even in March, when the trees were still bare, it was easy to tell how densely forested they were with pine, oak and maple trees. The Cross-valley Expressway effectively conjoins the two opposing mountains across the river.

I would later come to understand just how the mountains and the river would help to not only define the area visually, but also serve as the sources of some of its richest narratives.

Post structuralists argue that "culture" constitutes the objects which it purports to describe (Goldstein, 34). Understanding the sociopolitical contexts of a given happening and its impact requires at least some history of acts, physical space, agents, and time which may be relevant to the happening. Social response does not happen randomly or in a vacuum—it is active as well as reactive, dependent upon

interpretation of a variety of stimuli. It is unreasonable to assume that this chapter, indeed this entire dissertation, could possibly address every historical factor related to a comprehensive understanding of the famous Wilkes-Barre newspaper strike of 1978. To do so, this study would need to examine everything from humankind's first use of language as social tool to the full history of commerce and trade. Indeed, this study does not pretend to offer anything more than one possible configuration of historical influences which have relevance to the case at hand. Historical context, even if it is incomplete as nearly all claims of historical accounts must be, helps us to better understand social practices in a given moment.

The Wilkes-Barre newspaper strike case offers an opportunity to examine the public and private articulation of community identity in response to economic, physical, and ecologic change that emerged from several uncontrollable circumstances. Those circumstances include the death of the industrial economic base of the area, the 1972 Agnes Flood, and population shifts, all of which occurred prior to the union strike at *The Times Leader*. Addressing change often means re-articulating a sense of self. Who are we? What do we want to be? It is this process of re-articulation I want to explore.

Because my case study for this dissertation focuses on a significant event in the history of Wilkes-Barre, it makes sense to offer some background on the community itself. Thus, in this chapter, I will provide current statistical information useful in forming a picture of Wilkes-Barre as it is today. In addition, I will highlight three key events in history that emerge as influential in shaping some of the narratives I gathered throughout my research on the newspaper strike. Obviously, as is the case with any historical re-telling of events, the details I choose to highlight are limited in scope. However, people I interviewed and a variety of other historical sources concur that the events I have chosen to highlight were important in shaping social, economic, and physical changes in the area.

The historical information I offer throughout this chapter is verified by a number of key sources I will cite at its conclusion.



## Wilkes-Barre Today

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, is the county seat for Luzerne County. Wilkes-Barre's population stands in the neighborhood of 47,000 people; however, the county population is much larger—319,250. Wilkes-Barre is one of three major cities that make up the major metropolitan area of Wilkes-Barre, Scranton, and Hazelton. Each of the cities is separated by just a few miles, and linked by small communities and villages along the path of the Wyoming River Valley. The population of the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton/Hazleton metropolitan statistical area is 624,776. Wilkes-Barre and Hazelton are both located in Luzerne County, while Scranton is the county seat for the neighboring Lackawanna County (<http://www.wilkes-barre.org/pages/dobusiness/statistics/population.html>)

Wilkes-Barre is 111 miles north of Philadelphia and 134 miles west of New York City; thus it has long been regarded as a bedroom community to both. In fact, Wilkes-Barre supports many commuters who travel into and out of each city daily for work.

As a result, Wilkes-Barre is actually a relatively small community with the feel of something much larger on several fronts. While Wilkes-Barre's economic base was founded largely on mining and manufacturing; today nearly half of its employment comes from professional services—health care, education, legal, etc.—and retail trade (total 48.3%). Manufacturing and mining have slipped to supporting less than 20% of the area population. Currently, the unemployment figures for the area are comparable to the national figures. Unemployment in the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton/Hazleton MSA is at 4.9%. Pennsylvania stands at 4.5%, and nationally unemployment is at 4.1% at this writing (<http://www.phil.frb.org/ccca/capubs/Scranton/demographics.pdf>).

The median age for the population of Wilkes-Barre is 38.1 years and the average education for the majority of the population is somewhat lower than national statistics. Forty-four percent of the Wilkes-Barre adult population holds high school diplomas, while 12% have some college and 30% are college graduates. The average income is listed at \$35,454.

Like many communities across the nation over the past two decades, Wilkes-Barre saw its downtown retail area dry up and move out to the shopping mall district located in Wilkes-Barre Township, approximately 1.5 miles from the original site on Public Square. Currently, many shop fronts on the Public Square are boarded up and empty. But the local economic commission and Chamber of Commerce, along with individual business owners and the local government representatives, have recently spearheaded an effort to reinvigorate the downtown economy. Currently under construction is a movie 12-plex, and two large employers have recently moved to Public Square, or nearby.

Wilkes-Barre is rich in cultural diversity, as the next section of this chapter will illustrate. In the general downtown area alone are two synagogues and a Jewish Community Center, a Muslim Mosque, 28 different churches, nine of which are Catholic. The diversity of faith is reflected equally in the diverse architecture of the downtown—onion domes, gothic spires, and modern structures create the varied texture of the community.

For many reasons, Wilkes-Barre is also a city that struggles with a fairly wide chasm between the haves and the have-nots. It is a community in which the Jaguars and Mercedes are as prevalent on the morning commute as the rusted pick-ups. Thanks in part to the boom years of anthracite and very wise investments by some of the community's oldest families, the wealthy are very obviously wealthy. Conversely, Wilkes-Barre struggles with a burgeoning homeless problem and South Wilkes-Barre especially—just off the downtown area where Wilkes University is located—has suffered a jump in violent crime, drug use, and prostitution in the last decade. It is, in some ways, a city of two faces.

According to many sources, three segments of Wilkes-Barre's history have contributed significantly to its present and influenced how current residents have perceived Wilkes-Barre as a community: settlement patterns, the rise and fall of the coal industry, and the 1972 Agnes flood.

## Settlement

When the first sixteen white settlers arrived in the area in 1762 they found grassy plains, endless trees, and what Robert Louis Stevenson would call over a century later, “a shining river and desirable valley” nestled amidst round-topped mountains.

Throughout the next century, European settlers would flock to the area, drawn by the burgeoning economic opportunities and the beautiful landscape. In just ten years between 1890 and 1900, Wilkes-Barre’s population grew from 37,718 to 51,721. Notably, Wilkes-Barre’s settlement was described not as a melting pot at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but rather, more accurately as a mosaic of varying colored and textured tiles. Each tile, while certainly a part of the larger picture, had its own unique boundaries. Numerous ethnic groups chose to settle together in clusters where native languages were exclusively spoken and traditional practices and religions dominated well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first census that recorded ethnicity was conducted in 1920 and offered a glimpse into the diversity of the Wyoming Valley at that time. In 1920, eight separate ethnic groups were seen to dominate the region: Polish, Italian, Lithuanian, Slovak, Welsh, English, German and Irish. The largest segment of the population was Polish, with 28,808 residents, but even the smallest segment—the Irish with nearly 4,000—could be considered noteworthy in size.

By most accounts, Wilkes-Barre and the surrounding small communities along the Wyoming Valley, supported individual neighborhoods that reflected separate European ancestries. Some of the settlement patterns were according to the vocation or skills with which the immigrants came to the area. The Lithuanian and Polish immigrants, for example, tended to settle in major coal areas—and in “company towns” set up by the major coal companies—whereas, Italians settled more in the business district of Wilkes-Barre and adjacent areas because many Italians came to the area as skilled craftsmen such as stone cutters and silk makers.

Each of the ethnic pockets supported schools that taught in native languages. In addition, the neighborhood churches offered services or masses in German,

Polish, even Lithuanian, and business was often conducted across cultural lines only with an interpreter. As was eventually the case for the rest of the country, most of those pockets began to overlap and English became the dominant language. But as late as the 1960s and early 1970s these exclusive pockets of European culture still existed. Even today there are residents of Wilkes-Barre whose families have always spoken the “native tongue” in the home. Comparatively, Wilkes-Barre and the surrounding smaller communities in the Wyoming Valley have been relatively slow to change. Indeed, if American culture may be seen as a melting pot, the Wyoming Valley might be said to have been a holdout for the mosaic appeal.

As was certainly the case across the nation, the 1980 census indicates the enormous influx of immigrants from the 1920 figures. While the Polish population 60 years later still dominated the picture, the influx of Irish residents took an enormous leap. In addition, in the years following World War II, the area saw a jump in the Jewish immigrant population as well as that of Eastern Europe.

One of the things many Wilkes-Barre residents agree on is the importance of maintaining ethnic heritage today. There are clubs and social groups scattered along the Wyoming Valley expressly for that purpose. And Wilkes-Barre is well-known for its numerous ethnic festivals—Polishfest, Italian Days, Coal Street St. Patrick’s Day/Irish festival, and many other bazaars and neighborhood celebrations often associated with the ethnic heritage of the local church (frequently Russian, Czech, or Polish). Most residents acknowledge that respect for ethnic heritage is a long-standing tradition of the area and it plays a significant role in understanding how the community sees itself in any given circumstance.

### **The Rise and Fall of King Coal**

Much of the population explosion that occurred in the region from the early 1830s to approximately 1920 may be attributed to the discovery and commodification of anthracite coal.

Anthracite, the cleanest burning coal, is also extraordinarily difficult to extract from the earth; thus, it was a significant toll the mining industry took on the hundreds of thousands of immigrant miners who toiled below the earth. Many men

and young boys died under the harsh conditions of the mines. The anthracite mining techniques also exacted a toll on the environment. Even today, environmental protection groups in the Wyoming Valley lobby hard to receive federal funding for "brown field" reclamation projects aimed at rejuvenation of mine areas. The mine run-off into the Susquehanna, other area rivers, and streams has also made local waterways some of the worst polluted in the Northeast.

Despite this, the anthracite industry is attributed with ending the nation's dependence on foreign coal, spurring the Industrial Revolution, and transforming Wilkes-Barre into an affluent, thriving city. This duality—hardship and simultaneous gain—is indicative of the love-hate relationship the area still has with its "coal cracker" history.

According to Sociologist Robert Wolensky's account of the rise of the industry, samples of the "black diamond" were taken to England as early as 1765., and mines were in operation as early as 1808 (*Better*, 3). By the mid 1840s, anthracite was the fuel of choice for the relatively new nation. Northeastern Pennsylvania held 75% of the world's and 95% of the northern hemisphere's anthracite reserves. In his account of the anthracite industry, Wolensky outlines the parameters of the richest deposits:

The hard coal district covers a relatively small domain—125-miles long and 35 miles wide. Although it spans a ten-county area of some 3,300 square miles, only 484 square miles—a territory about the size of Manhattan Island—are underlain with workable seams. The region has been divided into four distinct fields: the southern, headquartered at Pottsville; the western-middle, located between Mahanoy City and Shamokin; the eastern-middle centered around Minersville and Hazelton; *and the northern situated in the Wilkes-Barre/Wyoming Valley* [emphasis mine] and Scranton/Lackawanna Valley areas. (*Knox Mine*, 5)

It was the northern field—located in Wilkes-Barre along the Susquehanna River—that contained the region's highest quality coal, but because of its distance from Philadelphia, it was the last of the four fields to be mined. However, by 1870, mining in the northern field had made Wilkes-Barre and Scranton wealthy metropolitan cities.

"Coal barons"—the term used to describe mine owners and industry bosses who had made huge sums of money from the coal business— primarily worked to attract immigrant men and their sons into mines with promises of steady work and fair wages. Children as young as seven followed fathers and uncles into the shafts because of the families' pressing need for money. "The typical son of a miner, at the age of 10 or 11, would go to the breaker separating slate from coal for 35 to 55 cents per day" ("Coal Crackers...Our Roots!" Part II, D3). In fact, from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the 20<sup>th</sup>, one out of every four mine workers was a boy under the age of fourteen, and they typically worked 10-hour days, six days a week as "breaker boys," sorting coal from rocks by hand (Biebel, G6).

The promise of steady work was real; however, what immigrant workers didn't understand was that there were strings attached to the promise of "fair wages." Management set up "company stores" from which miners were required to purchase all of their necessities from food to clothing to household supplies. The prices charged by the company stores were high, but the real catch was in the cycle of poverty they created and perpetuated. A new family would move to the area and a father and son would begin work in the mine. However, the family required food and basic start-up materials before the workers could receive their pay. The company sold the family the necessities "on credit" which would either be deducted from the miner's wages or need to be paid by the end of the month. Either way, those employed by the coal companies found it nearly impossible to get out from the initial debt they established, and were therefore inextricably bound to the company. The great fear, of course, was for a family to be left in debt with the death of a father in the mines, because the family was still bound to pay the company bill. Therefore, women and girls also worked in textile mills or as domestic help.

The fear of an untimely death was not unwarranted. The conditions in the mines themselves were often at best described as "hazardous." Accidents, fires, and cave-ins were daily occurrences. Some of the most noteworthy accidents included a fire in 1869 at a breaker in Avondale, approximately five miles west of Wilkes-Barre, where 110 men and boys suffocated; the Twin Shaft cave-in of 1896 which buried 59 men in Pittston, just five miles northeast of Wilkes-Barre; and the Baltimore Tunnel

disaster in 1919, which killed 84 men in Wilkes-Barre's East End when the cars on which the miners were riding exploded ("Coal Crackers—Our Roots!" Part II, D3).

Given the frequency of accidents, death was widely regarded as part of the business. One common story among natives of the area is that a woman would learn her husband had died in the mines when a company representative would knock on her door and ask if she were "John Brown's widow." That same representative would then ask if they should leave the body in the parlor or the kitchen.

Black Lung, a respiratory disease caused by breathing coal dust, was also a common, though slower mode of death for miners. Because companies were rewarded for the amount of tonnage they mined—and thus, miners were frequently paid according to their output rather than the time they worked—coal barons resisted purchasing expensive ventilation systems for the mines. In fact, the coal barons were roundly criticized by leaders such as John Mitchell, United Mine Worker's President in 1898, for the owners' apparent lack of interest in the safety and welfare of their workers. Although masks were available that might have cut the potential for Black Lung, many resisted their use and chose not to educate the miners. Similar to the Child Labor Laws of 1885 and 1903, governmental regulations regarding safety and health standards were widely ignored by company management. Obviously, there were some mine owners who tried to improve conditions for their workers, but most sources suggest they were in the minority ("Coal Crackers: Our Roots! Part III, D4).

### **Unions organize and public opinion is shaped**

The stranglehold that the coal companies had on workers also extended to city and county politics, as coal barons monopolized councils and influenced decisions on whether to bring in competing business industry. Given the poor working conditions, abuses of workers, and general disregard for federal regulations, the industry was ripe for labor organization. Initially, unions faced a huge uphill battle for acceptance. Powerful and wealthy coal company management launched widespread campaigns of misinformation, and when such campaigns failed, sometimes relied on threats and violence to keep workers from organizing.

But an 1897 incident in Lattimer, a few miles south of Wilkes-Barre, encouraged widespread public support of the miners and caused the Federal government to re-examine the situation and eventually intervene. Overall dissatisfaction with wages and working conditions prompted mule drivers to refuse work at the Honey Brook Colliery. After a brief scuffle with management, 2,000 workers then chose to march from colliery to colliery in the Wilkes-Barre area to persuade other workers to leave their posts. Coal company management sought the help of the Luzerne County Sheriff, James L. Martin, who deputized 87 men widely regarded as loyal to coal company management.

On September 10, 1897, 300 protesters met with the Sheriff and his posse at the Lattimer mine. The protesters were unarmed. When the striking workers approached the posse, the Sheriff ordered them to disperse. When they did not, someone shouted “fire” and members of the posse shot at the strikers. Nineteen died and over 30 other were wounded. The public’s shock at what was later to become known as the “Lattimer massacre” and the fact that so many unarmed men might be slaughtered in the street, actually made the miners’ cause more sympathetic.

In 1902, 150,000 anthracite workers walked off their jobs demanding a 20% pay hike—wages averaged less than \$400 annually for miners and had seen only minimal increases in two decades. While not all striking workers were located specifically in the Wilkes-Barre area, many were, as its mines were certainly the nation’s richest. During this strike, the widest ever in the industry, union leaders emerged as the “voices of reason” to the public and demonstrated unfailing dedication to the rights of workers. Union President, John Mitchell, also recognized a key failing in previous efforts to come together—miners’ differing cultural backgrounds, languages, and a general mistrust of those of other ethnic heritage and background. Mitchell successfully argued for unity within the ranks of miners and other anthracite industry employees by arguing for cross-cultural unity.

In an unprecedented move, the federal government intervened in the dispute, the social and economic ripple-effects of which had been felt across the entire nation. President Theodore Roosevelt brought union leaders and industry management representatives together and eventually got them to agree to abide by the plan



devised by a commission. The dictates of the commission—pay raises, safety enhancements, and 8-hour work days—were generally thought to be a huge victory for organized labor and secured loyalty to union leaders for many years to come.

However, though labor unions were formed to represent the interests of workers and to better their working conditions, union members and particularly their representatives, were widely regarded with suspicion and disdain by the Wilkes-Barre community's upper class outside the mining industry. Union members and management at the mines were frequently on opposite sides of the fence on issues of safety, hours, wages, job security and many other issues. Management sought to minimize costs while bringing in major profits, and workers sought better wages and working conditions. This tension had widespread social effects beyond the mining industry and within the growing Wilkes-Barre community.

As Thomas J. Keil points out, the area's wealthiest residents, while not directly associated with the mining industry per se, were dependent upon mining and the continued success of the industry for many reasons.

Many upper class families held coal leases from which they received revenues only when the mines were producing; they had investments in companies that sold mining equipment and supplies and professional services to mining companies; and many of their fortunes were based in real estate development, finance, and related activities that were tied directly and indirectly to the continued growth and prosperity of the mining industry. (Keil, 18)

Thus, when disputes occurred and labor unions chose to strike, the interests of the area's upper class were threatened. Keil argues that this is the prevailing reason the upper class families of the area frequently sided with coal company management. Whatever socio-economic divisions naturally existed in sheer dollars and cents, social and political chasms also emerged through the union presence in the area. Labor has long been associated with working class issues, and has long been distrusted by those whose economic interests could be affected by a strong union presence.

### Coal business sinks

By 1910, anthracite production was booming. The all-time production high of over 100 million tons mined occurred in 1917. This was due in part to a transformation of the industry from a smaller, family-owned business structure to a huge corporate ownership, most of which was associated in some way with the railroads. By the turn of the century, most of the anthracite business had experienced some form of consolidation and a small number of corporations controlled the industry.

But with corporate ownership came greater capital investment in issues such as safety and adherence to federal regulations, but also, by most accounts, greater greed and market pressures. As a result, in order to boost profit and reduce costs, corporate owners instituted a strategy of sub-contracting, leasing mines and hiring independent work crews of 20-30 men. By 1920, many corporations participated in the subcontracting/leasing practices, though to the detriment of the industry and to the objections of the labor unions.

Many, though not all, contractors made their profits by violating the union wage rate, by changing work rules, by taking coal in off-limit areas, and by using unsafe mining practices. Eventually, various forms of corruption permeated the contracting system, including monetary 'kick-backs' to company bosses, falsification of coal weights, payoffs of inspectors, and even phantom employees whose wages were collected by the bosses. (Wolensky *Knox Mine* 102)

Due in part to these contracting/leasing practices, the industry's corruption and association with organized crime, and growing public reliance on newer, cleaner, cheaper sources of energy such as gas and oil, the anthracite industry began to stumble in the mid 1920s, and with it, eventually so, too, did the Wilkes-Barre economy.

In 1917, the anthracite industry saw its largest year of production of over 100 million tons—37.7 of which was mined in Luzerne County alone—but two decades later that figure had been effectively cut in half to 46 million tons, and by 1957, total tonnage equaled just 23 million tons, the lowest figure since 1878 (Bigler, 3). In terms of employment, the industry also lost thousands of jobs in a matter of just a few decades. At the turn of the century, the mining industry claimed nearly 130,000

employees. In 1938, the industry still boasted 97,000 employees; but by 1949, those numbers had diminished to approximately 72,000, and by 1957, the ranks were down to 25,000 and just 5,200 locally. Today, according to Pennsylvania Economy League figures, mining—which is, of course, no longer limited to anthracite mining but also incorporates strip mining—claims only 400 jobs in the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton/Hazleton metropolitan area.

### **Allegiance to unions remains strong**

But the anthracite industry *had* succeeded in putting Wilkes-Barre and the surrounding smaller communities of the Wyoming Valley on the map for businesses and industries interested in relocating from Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. Because the area saw serious economic and physical development through the anthracite industry, Wilkes-Barre community leaders sought and were successful in luring numerous large and noteworthy businesses to the area. Vulcan Iron Works, for example, which designed and forged steam locomotives, coal breakers, and boilerplates among other things, established early operations in South Wilkes-Barre and eventually grew to cover nearly ten acres of land. In addition, silk and garment factories served as the base for employing many local women and girls. The Wilkes-Barre Lace Factory was the first of its kind in the country, and eventually gained worldwide reputation for its quality and unheard-of production numbers. At one point, the factory recorded producing an average of 55,000 pairs of lace curtains a week. Eberhard-Faber, Planters Peanuts, and Woolworth's Department Stores all got their start in Wilkes-Barre, and through the 1970s, the community boasted several large department stores, breweries, candy, cigar and shoe factories.

It is important to note that through the decline of the anthracite industry, the allegiance to unions remained strong. The miners' experiences had taught the public of the Wyoming Valley that despite some corruption within the unions, there still remained a need for organization and a reliance on union leaders to "take care" of the workers. This dependence on unions was prevalent throughout most of the industries located in the Wyoming Valley until the 1980s, long after union affiliation had dissipated across the rest of the country.

## The Agnes Flood

The coal-rich mountains remain a defining feature of the Wyoming Valley, but perhaps just as important a natural resource is the Susquehanna River (translated from an Indian language to mean "long, crooked river"). It is the largest river basin east of the Mississippi River and the East Coast's longest.

[The Susquehanna] has two branches: the North which begins at Lake Otsego near Cooperstown, New York, some 1,193 feet above sea level, and the west, which has its mouth in Carrolltown, Pennsylvania. The branches meet at Northumberland, Pennsylvania. From its northernmost point in New York, the Susquehanna extends 444 miles southwesterly through 13 counties in New York 36 in Pennsylvania, and two in Maryland where it empties into the Chesapeake Bay at Havre de Grace. Eighty percent of the Bay's fresh water comes from the Susquehanna. The current population of the river basin is over three and one half million persons and is expected to exceed five million by the year 2020. (Wolensky *Better 3*)

The Susquehanna carves out the Wyoming Valley and effectively divides Wilkes-Barre Mountain from the Back Mountain. The city of Wilkes-Barre is located in the valley along the river's southern banks.

For years in the valley's early settlement, the river served as an essential food and water source, and important means for transportation and delivery of goods in trade. Despite this, the Susquehanna also posed a significant threat to those communities established along its banks. The first recorded flooding of the Susquehanna occurred in 1784. Other major floods struck in 1865, 1902, and 1936 (Wolensky *Better 3*).

However, the worst flood ever to strike the Wyoming Valley occurred in late June of 1972, when Tropical Storm Agnes reversed direction and hovered over Pennsylvania and New York for three days. The storm dumped eighteen inches of rain on some parts of the river basin north of the Wyoming Valley, and the ground, already saturated with heavy spring rains from the previous months, could not absorb excess moisture adequately. Some accounts likened the earth to a sponge too full with water. The river crested at 40.6 feet and far exceeded what the levies could handle. At the time, flood stage was 21 feet above zero on the gauge. (Lehman 22).

The resulting flood caused the greatest natural catastrophe the area had ever seen and damages that totaled over \$1 billion in the Wyoming Valley alone.

Throughout the ordeal, about 28 trillion gallons of water fell to earth, half of it on New York and Pennsylvania. Five thousand square miles were inundated. Two hundred twenty three counties and cities in nine states were afflicted. Nearly 100,000 homes, businesses, schools, churches, and other structures stood in ruin. One-quarter million people fled their homes. One hundred eighteen people died [six of those in Wilkes-Barre]. Final losses stood at \$3.5 billion. It was nothing less than the nation's most destructive natural disaster. (Wolensky *Better* 6)

Over 20,000 people were evacuated from Wilkes-Barre Friday, June 23. As the waters lapped at the edges of the dikes that morning, thousands of volunteers responded to the call for help to sandbag. But shortly after 11:00 a.m. the sirens wailed for people to abandon the effort as the dike had been breached up river. The water poured forth. Most evacuees hoped to return to their homes the next day. But the June 23 "evacuation" turned into months of exile for some.

With the river came not only water, but tons of mud. After the water had receded enough for people to return to their homes and businesses, what they found was extensive water damage and also piles of mud sometimes up to the second stories. Residents were forced to remain with relatives and friends on high ground sometimes for months as the clean-up progressed. Indeed, some purchased temporary mobile homes and stayed in makeshift trailer parks in the Back Mountain and on Wilkes-Barre Mountain while apartment buildings and homes underwent the long process of transformation in the valley.

President Richard M. Nixon declared 67 of the Commonwealth's counties disaster areas, and nearly 70% of Pennsylvania's losses occurred in Luzerne County. For Wilkes-Barre city, the Luzerne County seat, the damage was huge. Approximately 25,000 structures were affected. The local colleges—all located downtown—sustained \$19 million in damages collectively. Wilkes College (now University) was hit hardest with \$12 million in losses; King's College and Luzerne County Community Colleges each lost \$4 and \$3 million respectively. The downtown business and residential district was under 15 feet of water. Many of the city's three and four-story historic mansions, located along South River and Franklin

Streets immediately along the river common, had water above their second story ceilings. Hospitals, schools, churches, businesses, and offices—some of which had stood for over 150 years—were equally effected. Two cemeteries had new sections completely washed away—along with the most recent coffins buried there. In addition to the water damage, electrical shortages in various buildings also caused raging fires—most of which could not be reached by emergency personnel. Between the raging fires and raging floodwaters, Wilkes-Barre residents claim that it seemed all hell had broken loose.

On July 1, 1972, legislation for \$200 million in emergency relief cleared Congress. Combined with funds already available, a total of \$298.5 million was earmarked for direct grants. On August 9, House and Senate conferees agreed unanimously on key provisions of the Agnes Recovery Act, which received final legislative approval August 16, 1972. An Additional \$1.6 billion in assistance flowed to victims, \$1.3 billion of which was designated for low interest loans; \$200 million for temporary housing, unemployment compensation, and free food stamps; and an additional \$1 million to rebuild streets and flood control systems. Other federal monies for Pennsylvania included a \$250,000 grant for comprehensive planning, \$750,000 in claims paid by the Federal Insurance Administration, and \$189.3 million for Urban Renewal projects. Total aid to the Wyoming Valley totaled \$1.024 billion. (Wolensky *Better* 10).

But all of the federal and state aid couldn't do what the community members themselves did by pulling together and helping each other through the worst of the recovery period. Stories abound of charity and leadership within Wilkes-Barre and the surrounding smaller burghs of the valley. Strangers opened their doors to strangers—and let them stay for weeks. Local business owners and leaders met at all hours of the day and night to do things like get the electricity back on or open a road or discuss strategy for convincing Washington of financial need. Hundreds volunteered with the Red Cross to prepare meals. Local college students returned to the colleges early to help the clean-up effort and get the schools opened again for the fall semester. Wilkes College opened just two weeks late—a remarkable feat considering the damage it faced in late June. The Mennonite communities of Lancaster County and further West traveled in caravans to volunteer their assistance in scooping the river mud from the streets and homes. Most locals point to this period as “Wilkes-Barre’s darkest and finest hours.”

With the infusion of federal monies, Wilkes-Barre saw something of a renaissance over the next few years. Homes were restored—most opted to restore the historic buildings of the downtown to their original splendor rather than to tear them down and rebuild. Businesses were refurbished and the downtown received an overhaul with an entirely new façade including new streetlights and canopies. Streets were repaired and improved. The construction business and all that goes with it boomed.

But for some, the flood was the final blow. Because of the anthracite industry's steady decline and the resulting loss of jobs, the population in the Wyoming Valley, and Wilkes-Barre specifically, suffered a crisis of faith about the area's future. Following the flood, many of the downtown businesses that had served as the primary economic draw for Wilkes-Barre's Public Square—Percy Brown's, Woolworth's, and the Boston Store to name a few—opted to relocate to the newly opened shopping mall in Wilkes-Barre Township. While only approximately three miles apart, Wilkes-Barre Township was on higher ground, and political leaders of the area sought to make it the new economic hub. Thus, Wilkes-Barre city business owners, initially offered less expensive rent and enticed by the promise of more parking—in an era when driving seemed much more of a necessity than it had twenty years prior—abandoned downtown and moved to the mall. Such a physical shift is certainly not unique to Wilkes-Barre. Cities all across the country felt the decline in the traditional Main Street business district throughout the 70s, 80s and 90s. But coupled with the devastation of the flood, the trend to move to the mall made what had been the heart of Wilkes-Barre city, appear a poor investment.

Between 1930 and 1960, census figures show that Wilkes-Barre lost a full one-third of its population. Those who lost their jobs in the coal business but opted to retrain and/or begin with new businesses in Wilkes-Barre were sorely tested again when they lost their livelihoods a second time, this time to the Agnes Flood. As a result, many who evacuated Wilkes-Barre that June morning chose not to return at all. Today, the population of Wilkes-Barre City stands slightly below 50,000, a far cry from its boom years at the turn of the century.

## The Wilkes-Barre Newspaper Strike of 1978

“Every exploration, no matter how speculative and abstract, has to find some event or landmark through which it can gain access to the labyrinths of culture and power” —Lawrence Grossberg in *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, page 3.

In Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Mondays and Thursdays are Farmer’s Market days, and the Public Square literally blooms with miniature sunflowers, brilliant multi-colored bouquets of gladiolas, freshly picked ears of sweet corn or bundles of asparagus, bee keepers’ freshly filled jars of honey, and local caterers’ best efforts at homemade salsa, halushki, hummus, and focaccia. The square also comes alive with people. On good days, they are shoulder to shoulder to score the freshest, ripest, juiciest market trophies.

But this downtown energy happens only during market or when a special celebration occurs on Public Square, as the once bustling business area is now bruised by graffitied, empty storefronts.

Just off Public Square on Main Street stands the main office of *The Times Leader* daily newspaper. The building, like many on or near Public Square, is old and formidable—bleached stone and four stories, with a large brick addition on the back. Out of the office windows, employees of the *Times Leader* can look out on Public Square and many walk to the Farmer’s Market for their lunch hours, drawn by the smell of fresh potato pancakes and gyros.

Down the block from the *Times Leader* and around the corner on Washington Street stand the offices of Wilkes-Barre’s other daily newspaper, the *Citizens’ Voice*. More modern and Bauhaus-stark, this three-story building has a sturdy, no-nonsense appeal to it. Along the side of the brick building is a sans serif neon blue sign for the **Citizens’ Voice** boldly announcing to the passers-by that this is the professional home to one-time strikers turned veteran journalists.

Unlike the rest of the downtown, both buildings are active whether there is a Farmer’s Market that day or not—people are in and out at all hours of the day and night. The two offices are close enough to one another that were there not taller



buildings between them, one could almost be on the rooftop of the *Times Leader* building and shout headlines to the person atop the *Citizens' Voice* building.

The buildings between them do prohibit a direct line of vision, however, which some locals say is, if not intentional, necessary. The dividing line between the two newspapers, while geographically not more than a few yards and tall buildings, has long stood as one of the deepest and most emotional rifts of Wilkes-Barre's history.

The earlier references to space and spatial relations are intentional and necessary. The physical space that these two formidable businesses occupy is both literally and metaphorically important to the roles both newspapers have played in trying to articulate and control, albeit perhaps temporarily, the community's identity. As Kevin Hetherington notes, "...making space for oneself—a turf—is a major source of identification within identity practices. Within this set of expressive identities, in which the occasion is paramount to understanding their cultural and political formations, the spaces of those occasions are highly significant...space has a significant symbolic role in the production of identities" (*Expressions*, 18). Indeed, physical space was an important point of negotiation throughout the Wilkes-Barre newspaper strike far beyond the locations and sizes of the two newspaper buildings, as this case will illustrate.

But environment or physical space, as Hetherington also notes, is not the only important factor in understanding how connections are made in identity negotiation. History, or references to occasion (time-bound references to happenings), also can influence and shape perceptions of specific rhetorical messages, and hence affect the negotiation of community identity. In his famous work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson acknowledges the three most influential "institutions of power" as they pertained to "nation-building:" the census, the map, and the museum. Anderson argues that together and separately these institutions "profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion" (164). Indeed, the census, map, and museum each serve to publicly define parameters for understanding community. Effectively, they ask—*Who are we?* (census); *What are our physical boundaries?* (map); and *What do we wish to reflect about our experience?* (museum). Thus, what I call "history" in this case is actually

community members' active construction of their "museum," though certainly not in the bricks-and-mortar sense.

As we have learned from some of the all-stars among rhetorical theorists—e.g., Isocrates, Cicero, Quintilian—ethics and rhetoric are inherently connected. Indeed, as Quintilian argues, "...no man will ever be thoroughly accomplished in eloquence, who has not gained deep insight into the impulses of human nature, and formed his moral character on the precepts of others and his own reflection" (Bizzell and Herzberg 353). In keeping with a classical stance on the importance of considering the *polis* in all meaning making, one key to this case is also how community members acknowledged (or chose not to acknowledge) a sense of ethics.

Drawing from these broad organizational concepts—environment, history, and ethics—the remainder of this chapter will illustrate connections made across both public and private transcripts before, during and after the Wilkes-Barre newspaper strike of 1978. How these transcripts connect or do not connect illustrates aspects of the negotiation process that help to shed light on how (at least in this instance) various understandings of Wilkes-Barre's indentit(ies) have been articulated and re-articulated.

### **Wilkes-Barre's move from family-owned newspapers to corporate-run businesses**

According to one-time publisher of the *Times Leader*, Mark Contreras, Wilkes-Barre has been the home to more than 102 different newspapers since the late 1790s. (A2). In actuality, many unofficial publications—newsletters written in native Russian, German, Polish, or Slavic—would likely add another hundred to that figure, but weren't considered full community news services.

By the late 1930s, however, the competition had been whittled to three family-owned publications: *The Times Leader*, the *Evening News*, and the *Wilkes-Barre Record*. In 1939, the three merged to form the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company and to produce two daily (Monday through Saturday) newspapers—the *Times Leader*, *Evening News* which came out in the afternoon, and the *Wilkes-Barre Record*, which was a morning paper.

For over two decades the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company had very little competition for advertising revenue. While there were daily newspapers located in Hazelton, approximately 30 miles south of Wilkes-Barre, and in Scranton, just north of Wilkes-Barre, their readerships did not encroach significantly on the Wilkes-Barre market. The sole challenge for advertising revenue came from *The Sunday Independent*, a privately-owned, Sunday-only newspaper that eventually spurred the *Times Leader*, and very quickly thereafter, the *Citizens' Voice*, to invest in a Sunday edition of their own. Publishing once a week, however, did not provide enough revenue for the *Sunday Independent* to stay afloat, and it closed its doors for good in 1993.

Despite the success the two Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company newspapers enjoyed throughout the 1940s and 50s, several factors led owners to make yet another adjustment. First, the mining industry failed and the manufacturing industries followed soon after in an exodus from the county. Second, television and radio created new advertising markets. Third, production costs drastically increased. Thus the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company found itself struggling financially in 1970. In addition, the 1972 Agnes Flood caused enormous damage to the downtown newspaper offices and forced the owners to invest in all new equipment at a time when advertising revenue was already down. At this point, the Smith and Hourigan families—co-owners of the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company—chose to reduce production to a single daily newspaper called the *Times-Leader, Evening News and Record*.

Despite the shift to a single daily newspaper in 1972, the families faced two other major problems. First, as was the case for many family-owned businesses in the area, the next generation was not interested in taking over the reigns of the publishing company. Population in the county was decreasing *and* aging. One 79-year old Wilkes-Barre resident pointed out, "Since the 1960s our greatest export in the state of Pennsylvania has been our youth. That's been doubly true in Luzerne County." (Tom Bigler interview 4/9/99) Second, labor union demands for higher wages and better benefits, decreased advertising revenue, and the failed (and costly) effort to start a Sunday edition all combined to severely strain the company's finances. The financial pressure became too much for the families who owned

Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company, so by 1975 they agreed to sell the company and began to quietly seek a buyer.

Capital Cities Communications, Inc. (later to be known to residents almost exclusively as "Cap Cities") purchased Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company in May of 1978 for \$10.6 million. Most acknowledged that this bargain basement price resulted from the Smith and Hourigan families' desire to sell quickly, from the outstanding debt remaining on the newspaper, and from the fact that the newspaper was widely regarded by readers as sub-par in terms of quality of writing, design, and coverage (Keil 54). R.J. Morgan, former *Times Leader* reporter, acknowledged the shortcomings of the newspaper before it was purchased by Capital Cities in a 1984 article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. "'There was no tradition of journalistic excellence in Wilkes-Barre. If you could spell a name right you were a cut above the rest'" (Scheinin 14).

### **Cap Cities and local suspicion**

The Capital Cities purchase was immediately significant if for no other reason than it marked the first point in history that the newspaper had been owned by a corporation rather than by local families. As a result, employees voiced some trepidation about what such a shift might mean for management strategies, priorities, and of course, employment packages. Carl Romanelli, *Times Leader* journalist who would later become night City Editor for the *Citizens' Voice*, recalled the immediacy with which rumors began to circulate among employees at the *Time Leader* after the Capital Cities purchase: "The day after Capital Cities announced it had purchased the *Times Leader*, employees heard that Capital Cities was notorious for its union-busting tactics. This was a great concern to all unionized employees...Reports of union-busting on other Capital Cities [owned] newspapers continued to mount and the stories were not flattering, especially the story of the sudden firing of 54 workers in one day in Kansas City" (1).

Representatives of Capital Cities began in May of 1978 to work through contract negotiations with the newspapers' four unions representing stereotypers, pressmen, the International Typographical Union (ITU) and the Newspaper Guild (which largely represented writers and editors). Each union had a team of

representatives who met regularly with executives from Capital Cities to negotiate contracts. Stereotypers and pressmen were the first unions to negotiate, but the unions quickly formed a coalition (dubbed by employees "the Four Blocks of Anthracite") and tried to negotiate issues together. It quickly became clear that the primary dispute would not be wage increases, which everyone agreed to at 7% following President Jimmy Carter's national push for labor to keep wage hike demands at or below 8%. The real problem seemed to lie in the issue of control.

Cap Cities wanted to limit sick leave and overtime—that was bad enough, but it was also committed to cementing control over hiring, firing, promotions and transfers...Cap Cities wanted to cut the number of composing room jobs, change work rules, rewrite job security provisions. Bill Brown, Newspaper Guild international representative who was in Wilkes-Barre at the time, says there was a clause in the company's proposed contract stating that management would be the sole judge of competency. Brown didn't like that. The way he read it, management could fire someone if it didn't like the way the employee's hair was combed. (Scheinin 14)

It was precisely this level of control that Capital Cities executives criticized the previous owners of the *Times Leader* for having ceded so completely to the unions, and many speculated this union power to be a contributing factor for the Smiths and Hourigans having accepted such a relatively low sale price. The unions were so powerful before Cap Cities stepped in that all who worked at the newspaper knew well the boundaries of their jobs. In one story, a *Times Leader* employee claimed the atmosphere was "like walking into the last century." The worker knew not to answer someone a manager's phone because "it wasn't [her] job" (Scheinin 14). With this much power at stake, both sides were understandably nervous about the new marriage and everyone knew a fight was coming.

In fact, Capital Cities executives were so sure of the looming war that during the union negotiations in the summer of 1978—several months prior to the actual walk-out—the company erected a chain link fence that surrounded the building and its parking lot (sources vary in descriptions of the fence saying it was anywhere from 8 to 12 feet high) which they eventually topped with barbed wire. The emotional and visual impact of the fence caused many residents, even those unassociated with the newspaper, to liken it to a concentration camp. Capital Cities also directed that security cameras be set up throughout the building and that the

third floor be cleared (ostensibly in case they needed to use the space for temporary residences for imported workers). In addition, the company hired an outside security force—Wackenhut Security—in mid-September to “keep the peace” during the talks. In fact, security forces showed up in the newsroom with no prior warning from management. They were stationed around the building, both inside and out.

[On September 29] a contingent of Wackenhut guards marched into the Times Leader newsroom...They wore white helmets, dark blue slacks, light blue shirts and dark blue Eisenhower jackets. A few carried billy clubs. Almost all of them were black—a shocker in mostly white Wilkes-Barre. (Scheinin 15)

Most sources agree now that Capital Cities executives prepared themselves for the strike when they purchased the newspaper in the spring. The show of force prior to the walk-out, most argue, was for the benefit of the Wilkes-Barre residents. The defensive posture suggested publicly that the workers would likely become violent or lose control. The security forces were meant to encourage a “civilizing” image among residents (read: we will not tolerate violence), and, as many *Citizens’ Voice* workers now claim, to “humiliate” them.

September 30 marked the expiration of the Newspaper Guild’s labor contract. Union officials and Capital Cities executives continued to bargain for a few days, but employees knew what was coming. Despite intervention from federal mediators, on October 6, locals directed workers to strike the paper and 204 employees walked out. According to one report, “as the strikers walked out the door, someone, as the last act as a Capital Cities employee, reportedly wiped out the materials stored in the computer for the next scheduled edition of the paper” (Keil 89).

### **The strike and the birth of a newspaper**

While the drama of the actual walk-out the night of Friday, October 6 was undeniable, it had clearly been planned for several weeks. Well-organized strikers immediately set up a picket line, and union workers and volunteers from as far away as New Jersey quickly joined the throng. Estimates of additional supporters who joined the *Times Leader* picketers ranged from 3,000 to 5,000.

The off-duty workers from the [nearby] nuclear plant [who were all unionized] were almost immediately on hand to help with the shouting, the organizing, whatever the *Times Leader* workers needed. The sheer size of the

picketing group and demonstrators quadrupled in as many days. Only the old timers had seen strikes like that one—and they dated back to the coal days. (Bigler interview 4/9/99)

The following Monday, October 9, *The Citizens' Voice* made its debut as Wilkes-Barre's strike paper with the headlines: "New Arrival...Born Today...Wilkes-Barre *Citizens' Voice*" and "Human Dignity Needs Support." Clearly, given the organization necessary for writing, publishing, and distributing even a small newspaper, plans for the publication must have been in the works for several months.

By the time the strike came on October 6, 1978, the unions had secured large interest-free loans from the Newspaper Guild and from the recently merged international union representing pressmen and stereotypers. They also received strike benefits from these unions...The unions also secured access to printing equipment, presses, and production facilities at nominal costs by renting the facilities of the *Wyoming Valley Observer* [located in Plymouth eight miles from Wilkes-Barre] which supposedly was sympathetic to the unions' cause. (Keil 120)

The makeshift offices set up for the fledgling paper were located just across the alley from the *Times Leader*, above a bar called the No. 1 Pub. The pub also served as a favorite location for meetings long after the newspaper moved its offices to the Hotel Sterling several blocks away. In addition, prior to the strike, organizers lined up hundreds of area youth to help distribute the *Citizens' Voice*, and decimated the *Times Leader* distribution in the process as many of the new carriers for the *Voice* defected from the *Leader*. The October 9 issue even boasted a few advertisements, another clear sign of the organization that preceded the strike.

The first issue of the *Citizens' Voice* sold and distributed more than 45,000 copies in and around Wilkes-Barre. But from the very first issue, strikers made it clear that the *Citizens' Voice* was a temporary solution. Once the strike was over, workers intended to return to their jobs at the *Times Leader*.

The *Citizens' Voice* is an interim newspaper that will be published by the Wilkes-Barre Council of Newspaper Unions for the duration of the current labor dispute.

On settlement of the dispute, the *Citizens' Voice* will cease publication and Wilkes-Barre newspaper employees will return to

their regular jobs. The *Voice* is YOUR paper, published by your friends and neighbors. ("Your Paper" 1)

Conversely, the *Times Leader* was brought to a standstill for nearly a week, thanks to the escalation of strike violence. Even as early as the first night of the strike, police reports indicate at least two scuffles between Wackenhut Security guards and picketers. Though local police warned each side that they would arrest those who perpetrated any violence, strikers continued with vandalism, taunts and threats. Strikers and demonstrators (the latter were by and large not affiliated with the newspaper, but were sympathetic to the workers' cause and joined the fray) pelted the side of the *Times Leader* building with "paint bombs" (light bulbs, bottles, and plastic bags filled with paint) and sprayed graffiti such as "Scabhouse." Replacement workers—referred to as "scabs" by demonstrators—were bused into the *Times Leader* parking lot and escorted into the building by security forces. They were harassed and taunted, and sometimes skirmishes would break out between security people and picketers as the latter physically obstructed entry into the building. Demonstrators also attacked *Times Leader* vehicles. They slashed distribution trucks' tires, cut fuel lines and threw rocks at the windshields (Capital Cities management quickly covered windshields and windows on its vehicles with plexiglass).

In several instances, striking workers claimed to have been injured by vehicles that barreled past them and knocked them over. Indeed, there were over a dozen people hospitalized during the first week of the strike, most of them strikers complaining of cuts or bruises from being bumped by passing cars. On October 25, picketers and security forces clashed once again, but this skirmish landed several people in the hospital with more serious injuries than had been reported to date. One Wackenhut security person, John Burgess, was attacked when he went to the aid of another guard. Police reports, and subsequent stories in the *Citizens' Voice* and in the broadcast media, indicated Burgess was "badly beaten" and hospitalized for several days with head injuries. Picketers claimed that they reacted to Burgess drawing his gun; however, Burgess later told the press that he was attempting to ensure the picketers didn't *take* the gun.



During this time, the Wackenhut security forces repeatedly asked local police for more help in controlling the crowds. Most agree the police did only what was absolutely necessary, primarily because the police were sympathetic to the labor unions' cause. In addition, Capital Cities asked for State Police help and was denied. So Wackenhut forces were bolstered and guards were allowed to "take whatever measures necessary" to quell the violence. Wackenhut supplied over 200 security people to guard the external parameters of the building as well as the offices inside. But for the most part, the public construed the defensive stance taken by Capital Cities during the early days of the strike as hostile.

Capital Cities couldn't do anything right. When the Wackenhut guards sprayed demonstrators with fire extinguishers and hoses, the *Citizens' Voice* likened the guards' tactics to those of the Nazis and the old coal company police. When the company tried transporting employees to the plant in buses with plexiglass windows, demonstrators attacked and drove them away...The police did little to stop any of it. (Sheinin 16)

After suspending operations for a week, the *Times Leader* began to publish again, operating with a skeleton crew that consisted of a few journalists imported from other Capital Cities-owned newspapers in other parts of the country and the very few original *Times Leader* employees who crossed the picket line or chose not to go on strike. One of the latter was Bill Griffith, who Capital Cities executives agreed to promote to Managing Editor of the *Times Leader* if he agreed to give up his union card. Griffith's determination to stay with the *Times Leader* was likely one of the primary reasons the newspaper was able to publish at all during those early strike days. "Griff," as he was known to most in the community, had long-time contacts in Wilkes-Barre, and while he and others who chose to stay faced a great deal of public criticism—and outright abandonment in some cases—those roots ran deep, and eventually helped reconnect the paper to the community when residents considered much of the staff "outsiders."

### **Early days not without trouble—for both operations**

Despite their best efforts to get back on track, the new *Times Leader* staff faced an arduous task—not only to publish, but to get anyone to talk with reporters, give

them news to print, or to place ads. Local advertisers abandoned the paper in favor of the *Citizen's Voice*. In fact, some locals claim there were threats, both implied and overt, to business owners about placing ads in the *Times Leader*. One local businessman (now retired) said, "I could never have advertised with the *Times Leader* during the early days [of the strike]. If I did, I would have come in to find some windows busted out, or worse." (Interview with retired center city business owner, 5/17/99). Newsstands that had long carried the *Leader* prior to the strike, left bundles unopened on their stoops or made show of throwing the stacks in the garbage. Distribution trucks would toss bundles out at designated pick-up spots, only find them there the following day because the boys and girls who delivered the papers did not pick them up. Locals refused to talk with reporters about even the most mundane stories. During the strike's most violent peak, shortly after the *Times Leader* began to publish again, reporters even found it safer to work at remote sites and bring in their stories (through the back door) during paste-up.

But Capital Cities continued to sink money into the *Times Leader*, upgrading equipment, retraining and upgrading quality, and redesigning the look of the paper to make it more professional. And after awhile, advertisers started to come back. By all accounts, the turning point seemed to be when the *Times Leader* landed some national department store chain ads in conjunction with an anniversary celebration at the mall that helped buoy the advertising department until some of the smaller, local business began to relent in their boycott.

Despite its huge overnight success in advertising sales and subscriptions, the *Citizens' Voice* was not without its own challenges. Because the paper was considered a "strike publication," all workers at the paper were given strike benefits from the unions. Those benefits included health insurance and, initially, a \$65 per week salary. Everyone at the *Citizens' Voice* earned the same salary, from pressman to advertising representative to janitor to managing editor. Everyone had been taking a huge pay cut in order to work at the strike paper, and most did so with the belief that the strike would not last more than a few months and they would return to their jobs and regular salaries, most of which were \$250-\$300 per week more. Most workers therefore had to supplement their income by moonlighting at other jobs in order to make ends meet. Some employees had young children at home to

provide for, some had children in college, and almost all had mortgages and debts that were mounting quickly.

In addition to the financial strains, employees were also forced to adjust to using borrowed (and often substandard) equipment and in facilities that were less than desirable. Indeed, according to Paul Golias, because the *Voice* could not afford a wire service for its first six months, reporters had to learn about national and international happenings by watching the television news or listening to the radio (interview with Paul Golias 4/15/99).

A year after it began, the *Citizens' Voice* moved its operations—all but the pressmen—to offices in a dilapidated downtown hotel famous for its cockroach infestation and crumbling plaster. It wasn't until 1984 that all departments of the operation could work in the same building. Six years after the strike began, the *Citizens' Voice* finally purchased a new downtown building (again, just a stone's throw from the *Times Leader* building), a new computer system, and new offset press.

Finally, another issue that would continue to plague the *Citizens' Voice* for several years was the question of who would manage the new publication and how. Initially, of course, striking workers wanted a democratic decision-making process. The Council of Newspaper Unions (aka Four Blocks of Anthracite) served as the first leadership for the paper and the strike. The Council consisted of four union representatives who were responsible both for directing the strike and organizing the financial aspects for the paper start up. The Four Blocks of Anthracite then formed what would become known as The Unity Council that consisted of two representatives from each of the four union locals. That Unity Council served as the governing body and policy-making entity for the publication. Representatives on the Council were elected by co-workers.

The Unity Council did not, however, direct the newspaper's content and editing. Initially long-time leaders of the staff were appointed to leadership positions at the *Citizen's Voice*. John Wyda, former editor, was appointed acting Managing Editor and Carl Romanelli, former night city desk editor, served as Editorial Page Editor. The publisher during the early days of the newspaper was the Council of Newspaper Unions, which footed the publication start-up and

maintenance costs from the national/international unions. Not long after the paper's inception, however, the Council shuffled personnel assignments and Paul Golias became Managing Editor and remains so today. Thomas Keil points out the evident confusion workers at the *Citizens' Voice* had over ownership, which eventually translated to questions of who was in charge.

As late as 1982, many of the rank and file thought they were the owners of record. It was not until sometime in 1983 that the paper's governing body explained to the strikers that the paper was not owned directly by the workers...it was owned by the Council of Newspaper Unions. (117-118)

The Council explained to workers that while the paper was not employee-owned (workers did not immediately have equity in the newspaper, but eventually gained it through the incorporation of the paper and dividing shares of the company among workers) it was employee-managed. However, questions about money management and how to take the *Citizens' Voice* from a non-profit strike paper to a for-profit corporation encouraged the employees to form the Committee for Concern for a Bigger and Better *Citizens' Voice*. The Committee for Concern served as the rank and file's watchdog for any mismanagement and encouraged co-workers to get involved and ask questions. The impetus for this concern stemmed from rumors that circulated about mismanagement of funds. Carl Romanelli, Secretary for the Committee, relates the following story about the importance of a watchdog committee among the workers. Initially, the Committee was designed to keep the *Citizens' Voice* from making the same mistakes that Capital Cities had made with its secrecy and lack of regard for the common worker. But the Committee also seemed to evolve from a deep need for accountability and to spread the responsibility for decision-making out beyond the level of "management." The union workers were fairly suspicious of management even when it came from their own ranks.

We [workers] were shot down on every question we asked about finances, taxes, and the money in the escrow account. The stock question was always answered with the question, 'Are you people IRS agents?'

After the meeting a group of us, feeling hurt and betrayed by the same people we used to call brothers and sisters, gathered at my house to discuss our plans to seek justice and equality. The Committee of Concern for a Bigger and Better *Citizens' Voice* was born...

The Committee's first task was to keep the rank-and-file employees abreast of suspected financial irregularities that were going on behind our back and under our noses...it would be extremely ironic if our paper turned out to be as corrupt and evil as Capital Cities was. If nothing else came from our fight, we felt that we would gain openness and truth from the board. (Romanelli 20)

So, despite a will on both sides to produce solid newspapers that served the community, neither was without major struggle—both internal and external—in those first few years of the strike.

### **Gradual acknowledgement that Wilkes-Barre is a two-newspaper town**

While the initial violence of the strike largely subsided by the end of the first year, the picketers themselves continued for four years until the unions were eventually decertified. While the picketers remained, *Times Leader* staff continued to be harassed verbally; due in part to this atmosphere, the newspaper also experienced high staff turnover in the first few years following the initial strike. In addition, the occasional vandalism—to the *Times Leader* building, to employees' property, and even to the *Times Leader* newspaper boxes—continued sporadically for several years, even after the picketing ended.

In the ensuing years after the picketing stopped, the community warmed to the *Times Leader*, basically because it earned readers' respect the old fashioned way. Writers and photographers at the *Leader* won state awards at press association meetings. The reporters proved to be doggedly determined to get the story, even without cooperation from police departments, court officials, politicians, business owners, or other traditional sources. "For a long time, the *Citizens' Voice* court reporter actually had an office set up for him in the courthouse. He was extremely powerful and well-connected. Basically, pretty much with the blessing of the local court officials, everyone saw to it that whoever was reporting on the courts for the *Times Leader* had to go to the *Citizens' Voice* writer to get any information. Everyone knew who was in charge" (Tom Bigler interview 4/9/99). But with persistence, the *Leader* did continue to publish and improve. After awhile, despite lingering animosity, community members began to see Wilkes-Barre as a town with two

competing newspapers. Even distributors who had long refused to carry the *Leader* relented.

[By 1983] all but one newsstand on Public Square was now selling the *Times Leader*—though it was sometimes sold under the counter like pornography. The lone holdout, Francis Corcoran of Anthracite News, finally relented, too. He recalls, 'We was with the *Voice* because we knew every one of them. I was born and raised with these guys. But then we find out that we're the only ones left who aren't sneaking the *Times Leader*...I called a friend at the *Voice* and says, 'Pal, I'm losing a lot of business over your paper. I'm going to have to take the *Times Leader*.' He says, 'Francie, we appreciate all you've done. You go ahead and do what you have to do.' (Scheinin 17)

The *Citizens' Voice* strike newspaper status—a status that defined its purpose and character so clearly in its first decade of existence—changed dramatically ten years after the inception of the strike. In early 1989, over a decade after the original strike, the *Citizen's Voice* converted from a non-profit strike paper to a for-profit corporation. The move was inevitable because the Newspaper Guild could no longer financially support the newspaper, nor did it need to. The *Voice* had attained a solid advertising base, and it made sense for the workers at the paper to take over its ownership formally. During the first ten years under the ownership of the Guild, a great deal of leadership shifting and internal strife occurred at the *Voice*; however, the conversion was successful and the newspaper became its own master.

For ten more years, the *Citizen's Voice* operated on its own—the incorporation of the business named the employees as shareholder/owners. But, in February of 2000, the *Citizens' Voice* was sold to the Times-Shamrock Corporation, a media group that owns over 15 other newspapers throughout northeast Pennsylvania and in cities such as Detroit, San Antonio, Orlando, and Baltimore to name just a few. Times-Shamrock also owns more than a dozen radio stations. Among those newspapers owned by the Times-Shamrock Corporation is the *Scranton Times-Tribune*. Now, as sister newspapers, the *Scranton Times-Tribune* and the *Citizens' Voice* have also forged an alliance with the local news station WBRE Channel 28. Interestingly, the sale of the *Citizens' Voice* to a corporation in 2000 caused no outcry among workers and passed almost without notice in the community.

There are several theories as to why this transition was so painless compared to the strife of 1978 . One is that while the new owner of the *Citizens' Voice* is indeed a media conglomerate, it was founded and continues to be run by the Lynett family. E.J. Lynett purchased the *Scranton Times* more than one hundred years ago, and has long been known as a former coal miner from a long line of laborers, which affords his legacy a good deal of respect in the area. The business has remained in the hands of the Lynett family, which also appealed to workers at the *Citizens' Voice*. At the same time that Times Shamrock was inquiring about the purchase, there were rumors that Knight Ridder Corporation might also make a bid. One *Citizens' Voice* reporter told me she hoped that the Knight Ridder scenario didn't come to fruition because, "they have such a corporate feel to them. We don't want to go back there."

The sale did allow the *Citizens' Voice* to invest in a much-needed redesign of the newspaper and also to invest more seriously in marketing efforts. Finally, the Sunday edition of the *Voice* now incorporates a section from the *Scranton Times-Tribune* called "The Cornerstone," and the *Citizens' Voice* and WBRE-Channel 28 each offer a daily "preview" of each other's top stories for the day.

In addition, changes in ownership continued for the *Times Leader*. Capital Cities eventually incorporated with ABC news and was purchased by Disney for a record \$19 billion in 1996. Knight Ridder Corporation then purchased the *Times Leader* from Disney one year later and serves as the *Times Leader's* current owner. Circulation for the *Times Leader* is a far cry from what it was during the early days of the strike. Daily circulation figures claim 48,851 and Sunday sales are currently reported at 69,525. The *Times Leader* currently employs 322 people.

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### Chapter 3

## Linking Public Practices from the Wilkes-Barre Newspaper Strike

### Introduction: Blurring Boundaries and Layering Stories

Kevin Hetherington acknowledges the importance (and the challenges) of blurring boundaries in his work on identity and politics. As I also argued in my first chapter, Hetherington is careful to point out that identity is constantly shifting, always negotiated, and layered. In his terms, identity is “bricolage,” or constructed with many overlapping, but separate materials. In fact, this position is consistent in most cultural studies theory on identity. Identity is forged through *differences* in representation and interpretation (see also, Hall, 1996, 1990; Grossberg, 1992, 1996; Couto, 1993; Woodward, 1997). We see ourselves as much by what we are *not* as by what we *are* or are becoming. But Hetherington notes that the actual construction of identity occurs in the *politics*, that space between recognizing and making sense of a tapestry of evidence.

...the local processes of identity negotiation do not always produce clear, homologous identity positions. Identity is about bricolage; identification is about homology. The identity politics and the alternative ways of living we see all around us are connotative of the interplay between bricolage and homology, or between the playful tactics of identity and ordering strategies of identification and recognition. (Hetherington, 28)

As Hetherington suggests here, an examination of identity politics has the potential to become mired in abstract philosophy and theory and lose sight of concrete application. In fact, it is the negotiation process—the “interplay” between struggle and identifying the nature of that struggle—that allows for the most provocative inquiry into identity. Can we *pinpoint* specific acts in that in-between space? Is it possible to understand those acts separately when they are so deeply dependent upon context? And is a conscious layering or connecting of those acts after the fact simply a convenient refiguring of realities to fit theory? That last question is a nagging problem that much theory-based research faces. Is something

true because it really happened that way? Or is it true because that's how we can re-see it to fit within the theoretical framework in which we've chosen to frame it?

If researchers are honest with their work, they have to admit that any re-seeing of events and subsequent interpretation of them results in a construct that does not reflect anything other than one way of looking at circumstances. In my case, by choosing certain key ideas such as concepts of space/environment, history, and ethics/agency I have actively and consciously guided readers' perceptions of Wilkes-Barre as a community. But I have chosen these organizing concepts because they seemed to emerge honestly from the stories I read and heard. As such, in my re-construction of the field, I do only what any research can: I offer an honest reflection of the truths as I saw them.

This does not mean that I have reconstructed something that is complete. I'm not sure that is even possible. There are obvious limits to what one researcher who did not witness the events first-hand can uncover over two decades after the happening. The stories I layer throughout this chapter are my best effort at creating one iteration, one attempt at overlapping separate materials for insight into the process. But neither is this merely an academic exercise in questioning the theoretical space between bricolage and homology. Assigning specific occurrences to what Hetherington calls "identity politics" is a useful endeavor, if for no other reason than to shed light on how articulations may be understood in this particularized setting. I want to examine space, history, and agency in very tangible applied terms. And the best way to do this is to show the public practices that pertain to these efforts at articulating Wilkes-Barre.

As I suggested in chapter 1, identifying and understanding *difference* is perhaps the first step in locating moments in which community members negotiate a sense of self. In order to locate those moments of difference among the public practices it also important to highlight shared experience or historical points of reference. Thus, the public practices I layer in the next section address agency and historical happenings. How do Wilkes-Barre community members define who they are within the context of the strike and how those perceptions differ from one another?

In any discussion of identity, it is also important to look at territory or physical space—the buildings and their proximity to one another and positioning within the community, the space dedicated to a given issue or concept in the newspapers themselves, and the perception of physical boundaries in Wilkes-Barre (crossing picket lines or the creation of barriers/walls). All such examples of space are means by which the people themselves conceive of community, as I will illustrate in the second section of this chapter. I also link this concept to *diaspora* as a means of showing one way to better understand the constitutive nature of identity as it evolves and changes when community members face physical displacement.

Finally, this chapter concludes with a section that layers public practices that articulate and re-articulate community values. Links occur within dialogue as a means of actively *negotiating* change—both among practitioners and audience members. Whether that change involves the perception of a specific value, ethic, or the definition of a term, community members find themselves in constant struggle to better answer the question *How are we supposed to behave?* The tensions that emerge from varying answers to this question are the points at which identity negotiation is most evident and where we can see articulation at work.

### **Who Are We? Negotiating Community Identity through Difference**

As I noted in the previous chapter, an important historic component of Wilkes-Barre's background was its economic tie to organized labor. Most agree that the long relationship with unions remained, even after the anthracite coal industry failed and the garment and textile industries also dissipated through the 1970s. The union mantra, "victory through solidarity" became what one long-time Wilkes-Barre native called, "our theme song in the valley." This sense of solidarity was further tested in the Agnes Flood in 1972. Because of the devastation and economic loss incurred, valley residents were compelled to join forces—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—to ensure recovery.

*The Citizens' Voice* actively relied on this allegiance to organized labor and themes of "solidarity in the face of adversity" and "preservation of human dignity" as it sought to quickly establish itself in 1978 as the "true" voice of the people and

the only real choice of newspapers in Wilkes-Barre. Conversely, the public practices initiated by the owners and writers of the *Times Leader* sought to challenge old definitions and widely held beliefs with new ways of looking at the strike and the behavior of community members. Individuals directly and indirectly associated with both papers also sought to re-articulate the importance of such ideals as “solidarity,” “human dignity,” “professionalism,” and “family” through letters to the editor and public comments at labor rallies or on the picket line. In all of these practices, we can see tensions—messages were received, interpreted, and as they linked with others, they re-articulated new “truths” about the unstable identity of the community.

### **Articulating solidarity and family *ethos***

It is appropriate to begin by examining the choice of the name for the strike newspaper. The name, *Citizens' Voice*, was initially developed by union leaders and the Newspaper Guild, but striking workers found it apropos and quickly assimilated it into their team identity. Paul Golias, Managing Editor of the *Citizens' Voice*, noted in an interview that the name of the newspaper reflected precisely what the publication aimed to be—a newspaper that communicated “the values, attitudes, and needs of this community. We strive to *be* the voice of the people, a place for the people of this valley to have their voices heard” (Paul Golias Interview: 4/15/99).

The plural possessive use of “citizen” in the title also worked to establish a sense of collective ownership, which was precisely the impact the strikers and union representatives sought. The new publication needed almost immediate buy-in from the public, and one savvy rhetorical strategy to that end was to include community members among those whose “voices” would be heard. What better way to ensure that than through the title of the publication?

The visual design choices of the *Citizens' Voice* are also consistent with the ideas of struggle, solidarity, and the paper of the working people. For example, the logo that bears the name of the newspaper uses all caps. By comparison, the *Times Leader* employs a more traditional approach by capitalizing only the first letter of each word. The all caps appeal in the *Citizens' Voice* logo communicates a shout, a desire to be heard. The newspaper chose to distinguish itself from the traditional

broadsheet design of the *Times Leader* and adopt instead a tabloid design for the publication. Newspaper design critics maintain that the tabloid layout has long been one that appeals to the middle to lower class of readers, the workers and laborers with less time to browse through a publication with multiple sections. According to newspaper design theorists and practitioners, the broadsheet, conversely, is the traditional layout for the middle-upper class readership (Evans, 1972; Harris and Lester, 2002).

But what did it mean for the newspaper to serve as the voice of the people? Who *were* Wilkes-Barre community members? Again, the *Citizens' Voice* writers and editors had something of an advantage in defining the audience and addressing community values because the strikers knew Wilkes-Barre. The original employees of the newspaper were mostly natives and many had been in the business of public communication in the Valley for some time. While the *Times Leader* did retain some of the original employees who turned in their union cards and chose not to strike, most who worked for the paper in the coming months were brought in from other Capital Cities-owned newspapers in places like Fort Worth, Texas and Kansas City, Missouri. As a result, the new employees had little history and few contacts on which to rely. It was no small challenge, particularly at the height of strike violence, for these new residents to learn about their audience.

The *Citizens' Voice* sought to immediately connect with readers by defining its purpose and directly addressing its audience as early as the first issue. In the middle-right text block corner of the front page of the first issue, writers boxed a statement of purpose for the paper under the heading "Your Paper." Again, this public statement (made in a newspaper with an initial circulation of 45,000) addressed expectations for readers and defined the publication's writers and editors as insiders. As such, "insiders" can be presumed to have intimate knowledge of Wilkes-Barre, which was important to establishing its *ethos* as "locally produced" and therefore trustworthy.

### **Your Paper**

The *Citizens' Voice* is an interim newspaper that will be published by the Wilkes-Barre Council of Newspaper Unions for the duration of the current labor dispute...

The Voice is YOUR paper, published by your friends and neighbors.  
(*Citizens' Voice*, October 9, 1978, 1)

Clearly, editors of the *Citizens' Voice* define themselves as Wilkes-Barre/Wyoming Valley residents who are stakeholders in the community welfare. By simultaneously naming the audience as owners (*your paper*), writers underscore the issue of shared stake in the outcome of the strike. If readers identify as owners of the *Citizens' Voice*, their collective and individual stake in its success grows. Also, by defining themselves as readers' "friends and neighbors," the strikers reiterate insider status. The implied message to the audience here is the necessity of supporting local interests and maintaining loyalty.

The value of loyalty is repeated in several instances throughout the first issue of the *Citizens' Voice*. In another boxed story on page one, editors celebrate the unprecedented success of the first run. In this self-congratulatory brief, the writers once again work to define reader values.

The response by residents of the "Valley With A Heart" is overwhelming to support the *Citizens' Voice*, the union newspaper based on the principle of human dignity. (*Citizens' Voice*, October 9, 1978, 1)

The concept of a "newspaper based on the principle of human dignity" is a direct response to the affront workers and other community members felt after Capital Cities brought in the security forces and built the barbed wire fence. The union representatives claimed before the strike ever began that their efforts at the negotiation table were solely designed to preserve workers' dignity with a sense of job security. While some might contend job security and personal dignity are akin to comparing apples to Chevrolets, the relationship was definitely there. Workers (and more specifically their union representatives) maintained that if owners created contracts that ensured job security, in effect this demonstrated a respect for the individual workers' professional worth. When Capital Cities executives balked at union officials' demands, the workers interpreted (and later publicly denounced) the action as a direct attack on the workers' character. The focus on "human dignity" and "pride" in many of the messages that emerged immediately after the declaration of the strike reflected long-held area values of tenacity in the face of adversity and



familial solidarity. The morning that the Council of Newspaper Unions declared the strike, union leaders drew on these themes to encourage public buy-in and also to define the very character of the community.

Two hundred newspaper employees ask with one voice: Can Wyoming Valley or Northeastern Pennsylvania accept a company like Capital Cities Communications?

Can an area that has always prided itself on heart, determination and courage allow anyone to be subjected to a barbed wire approach to employee relationships?

Would anyone in Wyoming Valley or Northeastern Pennsylvania allow themselves [sic] to be subjected to a Stalag environment without protest?

The answer must be 'no,' a 'thousand times no,' and 200 newspaper workers cry out , 'no, no, no!'

And we ask everyone to cry out No. (*Citizens' Voice* October 9, 1978, 2)

The concept of "one voice" and the request for support at the end of the statement is an active appeal to listeners and readers to see themselves as integral to the fight for justice. The message had strong potential for public impact because it was originally delivered as part of a public rally and speech that was televised, and it was later published in the first issue of the *Citizens' Voice*. Union spokesmen are careful to acknowledge "pride" and "courage" as essential to the history of the area. Audience members are likely to identify with and appreciate the labels, particularly when seen as opposite a "barbed wire approach to employee relationships." The references to the opposition as similar to Nazi Germany (barbed wire approach and Stalag environment) also work to articulate a black and white dichotomy between the workers/union officials/sympathizers and Capital Cities/strikebreakers/scabs. There is little, if any, gray area here.

Thomas Keil also acknowledged the importance of references to the ideals of "self-respect" and "human dignity" in the union representatives' stance.

The newspaper unions believed that their contracts expressed everything that the trade union movement in Wilkes-Barre, from the mine workers through the garment workers and other craft and industrial unions, had always stood for: the rights of workers to organize, to bargain collectively, to force owners to take into account workers' needs when setting company goals and the means for achieving them... In the unions' view, then, Capital Cities was asking them to repudiate everything that they and their forebears had accomplished by expecting them to accept degrading

working conditions that insulted their human dignity and human rights and undermined their individual self-respect and overall respectability in the community. (Keil, 75)

Indeed, the references to “forebears”, “history”, and the values long emulated by the working class of the area are largely what the rhetoric of the campaign relied on to inspire community identification with the cause. By defining the community as working class, most public practices in support of the striking union workers reflect ideals of who the laborer is and should be, and perhaps more importantly, why the laborer is of value to the community as a whole. For Wilkes-Barre, the working class, in its idealized sense, represents respect for tradition and history, courage, physical and social strength, and an unparalleled commitment to others—both co-workers and the community as a whole. Most practices in favor of the striking workers communicated just such idealization of the local working class.

Respect for history is paramount in the rhetoric that supported the strikers. Doing what one’s father and grandfather had done generations before—in this case, standing up for the laborer—was one’s duty to the community, not unlike military service. It was also a gesture of respect to individual *family history*, something we see evidence of in many references to overcoming obstacles and challenges throughout the Wilkes-Barre history. In the case of the strike, though some may not have wanted to leave their jobs, many felt obligated to strike because of this respect for family history. For example, Jim Pyrah, a typesetter for the *Times Leader* who went on strike with his union and helped set up the printing presses for the *Citizens’ Voice*, said in an interview, “I am not one for causing a ruckus. And I didn’t really *want* to strike. It might not have been my choice. But if I hadn’t done that, my dad would have disowned me. I never would have gone against the union. My dad would never have spoken to me again.” (Jim Pyrah interview, September 2, 2002).

This familial loyalty was and remains a strong point of identification, particularly as it pertains to the many ethnic groups in the area. Throughout the history of settlement in the Wyoming Valley, ethnic groups relied heavily on the notion of solidarity and “family” beyond blood ties to survive economic, physical and social challenges.

While the happenings in 1978 were somewhat removed from the language and economic barriers that immigrants faced from the turn of the century, the historical references to solidarity still resonated with community members. The public practices initiated by the striking workers relied on family and solidarity to instill a sense of the collective among community members and apply the positive feelings to the cause of the strikers. Former News Editor, Carl Romanelli saw the strikers from the *Times Leader* as family, people to whom he owed his loyalty. As he discussed with his wife whether or not he should help lead the strikers, he told her, "There are people who've preceded me, who'd given their sweat and blood for 25, 30 years, and they want to take it away with a stroke of the pen, everything they'd worked for.' I said to my wife, 'I'm going to go with my people'" (Schein 15).

In another example, Reverend Ayers' October 8 sermon, plays not only on the theme of solidarity, but also refers to historical obstacles and successes through tough times in the Wyoming Valley.

The union is not striking for more money. They have self-searching, suffering and hard work to face and much to endure...

We have had fires, mine caves, strikes, floods. We have shared dangers underground, and have learned to live and work together across religious, ethnic, social and cultural lines. ("We Deserve Better" *Citizens' Voice* October 9, 1978, 2)

When Ayers mentions mine cave-ins, floods, and previous strikes, he counts on most in his audience to recall their own personal experiences. There are few in his audience who do not have some personal loss and/or possible triumph associated with the Agnes flood. Given that the strike occurred just six years after the flood, the memories are still fresh for the community, and the collective effort to recover from losses sustained in the flood is ongoing. Also, most have parents or grandparents who had an affiliation in some way with the labor-based economy that dominated the area for decades, or they at least recall the area's most vivid historic losses such as the 1959 Knox Mine Disaster. These references, though not specific in the sermon, resonate because they draw on the collective knowledge of the area's experiences. And while they were, for the most part, huge challenges to solidarity, they also frequently gave birth to local lore of heroism and community togetherness. In addition, Ayers' references serve to *exclude* those Capital Cities executives, new

*Times Leader* staffers, and Wackenhut security forces, who are not native to the area. His reference to “the people of the Wyoming Valley area” clearly particularizes his message. He does not suggest that people from New York, Texas, Missouri, or any other area of the country from which the Capital Cities team came had not, at some point in their history, also suffered equal challenges or barriers to success. However, Ayers privileges the Wyoming Valley history as unique and therefore automatically distinguishes people in his audience who can and cannot identify with it.

The concepts of “one voice” and insider status were also communicated through local advertisements for the *Citizens’ Voice* both before its publication and after it was established. The Council of Newspaper Unions purchased several billboards and posted flyers announcing the new publication and providing contact information. One billboard touted the *Citizens’ Voice* as “Wyoming Valley’s New Daily Paper—100% Produced By Valley Residents” (Luzerne County Historical Society photo). The identification of *Citizens’ Voice* writers as “valley residents” perpetuated the “friends and neighbors” concept and again played to readers’ loyalties. Clearly, the friends and neighbors concept does not *say* that it’s a bad thing to be a New Yorker, but it is implied that if you’re an “outsider” or a big city executive, you certainly cannot know us or appreciate our value system.

The *Times Leader* was initially unable to respond directly to the challenge of “family” status that the *Citizens’ Voice* established as important. Writers for the *Times Leader* could not argue they reflected a familiar tone or even that they knew community members intimately. They didn’t, for the most part. But, the *Times Leader* did call into question the integrity and professionalism of some of the “family members” of the *Citizens’ Voice* and challenged community members to evaluate whether the family tree needed some pruning.

In an article titled “The Corruption Within,” *Times Leader* writers highlighted ethics violations and questionable practices of two of the *Citizens’ Voice*’s key leaders in the strike: Carl Romanelli, then editorial page editor for the *Voice*, and Jack Wallace, president of Local 120 Newspaper Guild union. Wallace, the article claimed, had been conducting a lottery sale of raffle tickets at the county courthouse (where he was a beat reporter). While the practice was not cited as “illegal” it was

widely regarded as unethical. The irony was that Wallace's practice of selling the lottery tickets occurred in 1977 when he worked for the *Times Leader* before the strike. In a sidebar article, (reprinted from a Harrisburg newspaper called *The Guide*), the writers reminded readers that Romanelli had been convicted in 1963 of embezzlement from banks Township where he served as a tax collector. The article went on to point out the irony (and ethical problems) of Romanelli's subsequent dual employment status as Senate Communications Officer and copy editor at the *Times Leader*. Again, the original article ran in May, 1977. The purpose for reprinting these articles was so that the *times Leader* could formally call into question the union's integrity. By way of explanation, the *Times Leader* writers offered the following:

The Constitution of the Newspaper Guild, in Article 1, Section 2, has this to say:

'The purpose of the Newspaper Guild shall be to advance the economic interests and to improve the working conditions of its members; to guarantee, as far as it is able, equal employment and advancement opportunity in the industry AND CONSTANT HONESTY IN NEWS, EDITORIALS, ADVERTISING AND BUSINESS PRACTICES: TO RAISE THE STANDARDS OF JOURNALISM AND ETHICS OF THE INDUSTRY...'

We capitalized the last portion of this clause because it is in such sharp contrast to some of the journalistic practices among the Guild's members in Wilkes-Barre.

...Editorial employees on outside payrolls...conducting public relations businesses on the side...selling illegal lottery tickets to news sources...holding a political job while a full-time employee of the newspaper.

What does this have to do with the strike? First, we think it tells you something of the union leadership. But chiefly, we believe that behind these 'sweet deals' lay the unspoken protection of the Newspaper Guild—something a new management would no longer tolerate. ("The Corruption Within" *Violence in the Valley*, November 28, 1978)

While the *Times Leader* writers do not question the importance of familial ties, this article (and the sidebar explanations) *does* question what community members *know* about the "family." Writers of the *Times Leader* consciously work to re-articulate a new understanding of corruption within the union and therefore call into question some of the ideals previously set forth by the *Citizens' Voice*.

### Insider/outsider dichotomy

As Stuart Hall notes, identity is perhaps never more evident than in the moments of actual negotiation and struggle—this is clear in the tension between the practices offered by both newspapers throughout the preceding section. The *Times Leader*, while less strident in its public name-calling and finger pointing, did offer some important responses (and alternative realities for readers) to the *Citizens' Voice* messages of betrayal and “outsider” status among other identity issues.

One of the most significant “responses” afforded by the *Times Leader* after the strike, came in the tabloid *Violence in the Valley* published November 28, 1978, almost two months after the strike began. In the tabloid, writers and editors for the newspaper explained the “company’s perspective” on the strike and its reflection of and on the character of Wilkes-Barre.

Since Oct. 6, the main mission of the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Co. has been to keep its newspaper alive in the face of strike violence and a campaign of anti-newspaper lies. Until now, the company has had little time to report to the people of the Wyoming Valley what has really been happening in the strike. What you will read in this section, quite frankly, is a company view of events. But we think it will open your eyes about the facts—some of them never reported before. (*Violence in the Valley*, November 28, 1978, 1)

Clearly in this introduction to the tabloid, writers for the *Times Leader* seek buy-in of a very different sort from what *Citizens' Voice* writers have invoked. Here there are no references to a collective “we.” As writers identify the “main mission” in this statement, it is interesting to see that they use a somewhat distant reference to the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Co. and “its newspaper.” Even the term “it” suggests inanimate more than it suggests animate. This reference, while proper for any newspaper trying to establish itself as an objective purveyor of news for the people, is also more emotionally removed from readers than if it were to identify as “friend” or “neighbor.” The *Citizens' Voice* references, conversely, make the newspaper sound as though it is a living, breathing entity—a shadow or mirror reflection of the community itself. This introduction to *Violence in the Valley*, however, communicates a self-knowledge that suggests an intentional “otherness” and distance from the “insider” status established by *Citizens' Voice* writers. Instead,

the *Times Leader* practice indicates reliance upon an alternate (and the implication here is *more complete*) truth.

The union depiction of the area as one populated by those who embody "heart, determination and courage" draws on audience identification with history, and simultaneously suggests that union officials intimately know the coal mining heritage of Wilkes-Barre. There is an irony in this "insider" rhetoric, however, given that the strike organizer, James Orcutt, was not from the area, but rather was sent by the Newspaper Guild to represent the union interests and serve as strike coordinator.

In fact, one of the means by which *Times Leader* practices respond to the "insider/outsider" dichotomy articulated by the *Citizens' Voice* is to point out the fallacies of some of the latter's arguments. One of these fallacies is the assumption that those who are both participating in and supporting the strike are collectively "insiders," that is, they are Wyoming Valley/Wilkes-Barre residents. However, given the vast numbers of union workers who came from neighboring communities to help with the protest, we know that non-native picketers far outnumbered natives. According to one article in the *Times Leader* the chief "outsider" was the strike organizer himself, Jim Orcutt. Orcutt was widely heralded by the *Citizens' Voice* as the "voice" of the community, despite the fact that he was only in Wilkes-Barre to represent the union. In a scathing article on this subject, *Times Leader* writers point out the inconsistency of such leadership from outside the Valley in what the *Citizens' Voice* has, for the most part, argued is a community issue.

He stalks the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company yelling "scab" to employees who choose to work.

Sometimes shouting isn't enough. He has pounded and gouged the faces and bodies of guards who protect employees as they cross picket lines.

Through his actions, he shows others how to fight. They learn to throw rocks and bricks. To kick. To spit in faces. To slash company tires and gas lines.

Who is he?

James Orcutt, 38, leader of the Wilkes-Barre strike.

But he doesn't live in the Wyoming Valley. Orcutt, a native of Brockton, Mass., is an international Newspaper Guild representative.

The Guild headquarters in Washington, D.C., sent him to Wilkes-Barre to organize the four unions at the *Times Leader*.

And he is well-paid for his union services. Last year, from January 1977 through March 1978, he received \$31,036 in salary and \$6,434 in expenses totaling \$37,470.

...With a change in management and the knowledge that the new owners would press to change...plus the clear intention of the company not to shut down its paper in the face of a strike, Orcutt's assignment to Wilkes-Barre was natural.

Orcutt is a strike specialist, not a bargaining specialist.

("The Strike Organizer" *Violence in the Valley*, November 28, 1978)

The article goes on to note that Orcutt was not the only union representative from outside the Wilkes-Barre community. The *Citizens' Voice's* first publisher, Bill Brown, and another Guild employee, Jeanne Towar, were both "imports" from Detroit who had no previous relationship with the Wilkes-Barre community.

Not only does "The Strike Organizer" article work to undermine the "friends and family" *ethos* of the striking workers, but it also suggests a certain hypocrisy in the Four Blocks of Anthracite identity the unions assumed. While the contention was that it honored parents and grandparents who worked in the mines, the "insider" status it afforded union representatives who were from cities other than Wilkes-Barre was not particularly accurate, nor, as *Times Leader* writers might contend, very honest.

The article on the strike organizer also works to dispel other key myths surrounding the strike. While the *Citizens' Voice* employees did indeed assume huge financial burden with a massive collective pay cut, not all those associated with the strike were destitute and struggling. By pointedly mentioning Orcutt's income from the Guild as a strike organizer, the message works to rearticulate the community concept of the strikers as a noble band of poor, working men and women up against the powerful force of a huge, wealthy corporation. Indeed, the article points out the great dichotomy between the substantial salary Orcutt receives from the union, and his physical appearance that communicates something very different. Citing an article that appeared in the *Philadelphia Magazine* on the strike, *Times Leader* writers work to paint a very different picture of "insider" status. "'Orcutt...always managed to look like a prop from 'On the Waterfront'...(he) was psyching both sides out with this costume of scruffy rancher's coat, blue wool pea cap, and square wire rimmed-



which-way-to-the-picket-line-comrade? glasses'" ("The Strike Organizer" *Violence in the Valley*, November 28, 1978).

The *Times Leader* practices that directly challenge community members' perceptions of insider/outsider status clearly work to dispel myths about what it is to be considered "local." These practices directly conflict and wrestle with *Citizens' Voice* claims of exclusive (insider) familial ties to the community.

But the solidarity theme alongside the "friends and neighbors" ethos remains a strong message of the *Citizens' Voice* over two decades after the onset of the strike, despite the fact that the *Voice* is no longer either a strike newspaper or worker-owned. Six years after the beginning of the strike, the *Citizens' Voice* published a special commemorative issue filled with photos from the strike, a brief history of the conflict, and a full-page sponsorship advertisement from the AFL-CIO. The ad highlights the Wilkes-Barre heritage of coal mining as it simultaneously tips a hat to the solidarity of the workers involved in the newspaper strike. This "outside" affirmation of "inside" support is again important to the ethos of the strikers' cause. While the advertisement itself comes out of the AFL-CIO New York headquarters, the support designates the sender in this case as a "friend" if not immediate neighbor. The AFL-CIO ad features three 3x5 black and white photos of the labor industry—one featuring a group of "breaker boys" of the old coal mining days, one of an adult laborer in a textile mill and one of six young newspaper carriers holding stacks of papers. The text of the ad reads:

**By the Sweat of Their Brows**

The face of the working man—or child—is one of determination.

From the beginning of recorded time, man has toiled, and more often than not, has received little in the way of compensation for his labor.

But the working man's faith and determination that he could improve his lot, always has remained a dream—a dream that exists today.

These photos sum up this feeling. From the breaker boys to the mechanic, who toiled long and hard for little pay, but who nevertheless held onto this dream so that their children would not have to toil as they. (*Citizens' Voice* commemorative issue, September 29, 1984, 10)

The concepts of "faith" and "determination" work to enhance the previous themes of solidarity and family ties and draw specifically on ideas long associated with the relationship between religion and work. Faith in this case is not direct

reference to organized religion, *per se*; however, local ties to religious organizations had historically strong resonance in the community. So, while probably not an overt, or even conscious reference to church, synagogue, or temple, the use of the word *faith* automatically encourages audience members to see the cause of the working class in this case as about more than politics and economics.

As Tom Bigler noted, "Over the years, people in the valley knew they could trust just three things—God, the family, and the union, and not necessarily always in that order. The union fought for the coal miners and then the garment workers, and then the workers in the textile plants. The coal barons and the factory owners never demonstrated that they cared about what happened to these people. And for workers to have a powerful brother who did, well, that was something. It brought workers together, made them feel part of an extended family" (Interview with Tom Bigler: 4/9/99). And with union affiliation—as with religious leadership—there came both power and respect, which is what the workers in this situation sought.

The AFL-CIO ad also underscores the importance of a strong work ethic, which is a blue collar/laborer attribute the strikers sought to cultivate and maintain. The ad reinforces these themes, in this case over six years since the onset of the strike. While the *intent* of the message was to verbally clap the striking workers on the back, the effect among readers had the potential to invoke identification with characteristics long associated with the community as a whole.

Similarly, in November 1978, the *Citizens' Voice* published a "Salute to America's Veterans!" as a tab insert. Throughout the extra Veteran's Day issue, *Voice* writers reiterated the relationship between religious faith, service, and work by rearticulating the purpose behind the strike and ethos of the striking workers. For example, on Page 1 of the tab, *Citizens' Voice* writers affirm a "pledge to serve," aligning their own cause with the cause of soldiers gone to war.

### **We Pledge to Serve**

The staff of the *Citizens' Voice*, YOUR newspaper published by your friends and neighbors, joins in this Veterans Day Parade salute! With the same unity and dedication of purpose that helped this nation overcome adversity, we pledge to serve YOU with the best possible newspaper for as long as necessary. Watch us grow—watch for improvements in the *Citizens' Voice*. Your faith in us and our faith in you is matched only by the great faith we still have in America, a nation preserved even in time of war by an

unending belief in each other and in God. (*Citizens' Voice*, November 12, 1978, 1)

Immediately below the "pledge" on page one was a quote purported to be from Dwight D. Eisenhower set off in a box bordered by stars:

Only a handful of reactionaries harbor the ugly thought of breaking unions and of depriving working men and women of the right to join a union of their own choice. I have no use for those...who hold some vain and foolish dream of spinning the clock back to the days when organized labor was huddled, almost as a helpless mass. (*Citizens' Voice*, November 12, 1978, 1)

Juxtaposed alongside the "pledge to serve," *Citizens' Voice* writers make clear connections among patriotic duty, service to humankind, and the moral justification for the strike itself. The power of Eisenhower's presidential persona only underscores the importance of the argument strikers have made for the preceding month. Readers are encouraged through the association of service, religion, duty to country, and work ethic to see any *lack of* support for the workers' cause as unpatriotic, indeed, even un-American.

The messages again make readers a part of the collective "we." In the comment, "Your faith in us and our faith in you is matched only by the great faith we still have in America," the persuasive appeal is that *you/your* plus *our* (as in unified *Citizens' Voice* identity) equals the collective faith *we* have. The *we* in this instance reiterates the importance of a collective sense of self—Wilkes-Barre/Wyoming Valley residents versus the corporate outsiders. It also underscores a sense of shared values. The assumption, certainly, is that readers will uniformly be patriotic and love God, the country, and the union. Naturally, the appeal to nationalism and patriotism is socially appropriate to the celebration of Veterans Day; however, the message additionally suggests that the American ideal is every bit as much about supporting the common workers' cause—and "war" against oppression and loss of dignity—as it is about service in the military.

The themes of solidarity and family are repeated in a variety of messages in the *Citizens' Voice*, published not only in the Veterans Day salute, but also in subsequent regular issues. While most examples of solidarity, family, and struggle themes emerged in the midst of and directly following the strike and the inception

of *The Citizens' Voice*, we see evidence of a consistent appeal to these same themes ten and twenty years after the strike. At the tenth anniversary of the first publication of the *Citizens' Voice*, the newspaper ran a commemorative issue on the strike and the ten years hence. While the issue's retrospective frequently recalled (in stories and photos) the "common man's" victory over big business, the issue also ran almost 300 advertisements from various labor unions up and down the Eastern seaboard.

In one ad, the reader is encouraged to purchase the *Citizens' Voice* as a matter of community responsibility.

**THE CITIZENS' VOICE** Is Produced By and For **THE PEOPLE OF THE WYOMING VALLEY**. We're your friends and neighbors working together to bring you all the news, sports, features and stories that an enlightened community depends upon. (*Citizens' Voice* advertisement text—punctuation and capitalization accurate to actual layout) (*Citizens' Voice* Oct. 7, 1988, 7)

The message about "friends and neighbors" is a reoccurring one not only in the text of stories, but in the advertisements promoting the newspaper. This ad introduces a new articulation for community identity, however, when it assumes the audience wants to be identified as an "enlightened community." Beyond the identification of categories of news, however, the ad does not further define what "enlightened" is or how Wilkes-Barre residents achieve it. This is the only example I located in my research in which the *Citizens' Voice* raises the issue of *enlightening* the community, despite the fact that the overriding purpose for most newspapers (at least in an ideal sense) is to *educate* or enlighten readers about the issues or concerns of their respective communities. It is interesting that the concepts of familial loyalty, patriotism, and union solidarity far outweigh the references to education.

An example of the more common appeal in the *Citizens' Voice* may be found in another advertisement celebrating the newspaper's anniversary. The sponsor, a local union for carpenters, praised the newspaper for its sense of family and dedication to the community.

**CONGRATULATIONS** to the **CITIZENS' VOICE** and all **ORGANIZED LABOR** on your **ACCOMPLISHMENTS THROUGH SOLIDARITY**. **UNITED BROTHERHOOD OF CARPENTERS** and **JOINERS** JOIN IN A SALUTE TO ORGANIZED LABOR. We have played a significant

part in the growth of this country that has culminated in today's freedom from exploitation, hunger and privation for the working man and woman. As we pass into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we will continue, ever so strongly and courageously, our task of workers helping workers to better their lives. (Area 1 Keystone District Council of Carpenters Local no. 514 advertisement, *Citizens' Voice*, October 7, 1988, C13)

The terms that are most visually dominant in the ad also highlight what the designers/writers and sponsors privilege in the articulation of Wilkes-Barre's identity—"Citizens' Voice," "organized labor," "accomplishments through solidarity," "brotherhood." Less visually dominant terms such as "growth," "freedom from exploitation," "workers helping workers," "working man and woman," "strong" and "courageous" all serve to underscore what organized labor stands for in the community.

One of the other consistent articulations of community identity from the *Citizens' Voice's* public practices relates to the historical importance of mining to the area. While mining had been declared officially dead as an industry since 1959, what it symbolized to labor—and specifically to the newspaper strike—was strength of character, solidarity, grit and determination. Members of the four unions associated with the Newspaper Guild publicly called themselves "the Four Blocks of Anthracite" and appealed for community support in picket signs and fliers in which they called themselves "sons and daughters of coal miners." Anthracite is the most difficult coal to mine and is also the hardest; thus, the identification with the most economically vital product of Northeastern Pennsylvania is as much a reference to quality as it is to heritage. References to coal mining in picket signs and public speeches were designed to elicit a sense of community solidarity and pride in the common worker who mines an uncommon treasure.

In what was to be among the first special sections run by an issue of the *Citizens' Voice*, (first published in 1979, almost a year after its establishment, and then run again "by popular demand" in 1988), the newspaper offered a "celebratory exploration" of the coal mining roots and incomparable work ethic of the community titled "Coal Crackers...OUR ROOTS!" The series explored in depth the "back-breaking work" in the mines that were "hell on earth" and how, before the unions and solidarity among workers, men regularly lost their lives, children lost

their childhood, and families suffered under enormous economic hardship as they came to "owe their souls to the company store" (*Citizens' Voice*, 1978 and 1988). According to Paul Golias, the series sought to affirm *The Citizens' Voice* as the "insider" paper. "The thing is, everyone who worked for the *Citizens' Voice* then, and even now, they are all residents of Wilkes-Barre. We know this city. We know the Valley. We know that the people here come from plain, hard working families. This series was about reaching into the past and celebrating who we are" (Interview with Paul Golias 4/15/99).

In the Labor Salute tab that celebrated in part the "success" of the striking workers who formed the *Citizens' Voice*, staff writers once again likened the community spirit behind the strike to the deep solidarity embodied by workers in the coal industry.

Regardless of what internal shape the *Voice* takes, its external role as a "voice" for Wyoming Valley will not change. When the people at the *Voice* talk about their roots, they point to Oct. 6, 1978, and proudly they note that the roots grow a little deeper into the anthracite veins of Wyoming Valley. (*Citizens' Voice*, "It all started with a fence..." October 7, 1988, C3)

The reference to "deeper into the anthracite veins" clearly invokes the coal mining heritage, with which writers count on audience members to identify emotionally. While coal is harvested via a "vein" carved into the earth, the term "vein" can also denote the vessel through which lifeblood in the human body is pumped. The association is natural and useful to privileging the importance—indeed, the necessity—of the laborer to the entire community body.

### **Human dignity and violence**

While the "preservation of human dignity" certainly emerged as a key theme for the strikers' cause, the *Times Leader* was poised to call into question how residents defined human dignity in practice. Community members' letters to the editor published in the *Times Leader* questioned of the nature of human dignity in the month following the strike's onset. However, while the letters make some bold claims, they also lack a certain authority in that most appeared in print without signatures. This "anonymous" submission practice is one in which neither

newspaper engages now—the trend across the nation has turned to only publishing letters whose sources can be verified. Current journalistic philosophy is that if a writer cannot stand by a written or verbal position, the position lacks power to persuade or inform readers.<sup>1</sup> But in 1978, both local newspapers and many others across the nation still printed letters without signatures, so even though the arguments lack a certain amount of credibility by today's standards, in 1978 it wouldn't have been seen as so.

There is another important point to make about the anonymity issue: most letters in support of the *Times Leader* or Capital Cities were likely submitted anonymously out of fear of retribution. Striking workers had been known to lash out at anyone who indicated even slight skepticism regarding union tactics. Indeed, over 20 years after the strike, I found many city residents still unwilling to go on the record with me for fear of still being labeled as a “scab sympathizer” or worse. Similarly, local businesses that even considered advertising with the *Times Leader* in the early days of the strike often found windows smashed or suffered other property vandalism or business fallout. One local grocery store chain, Weis/Mr. Z's, actually had local strikers picket its nearby locations for what union officials deemed overt support of Capital Cities. Thus, authors of letters to the editor published in the *Times Leader* needed to be very careful about being publicly identified as supporters of the corporation.

Despite the anonymity issue, the letters submitted to the *Times Leader* indicate a fairly uniform disdain for excessively violent strike tactics and openly question the concept of “human dignity” that strikers had claimed was the driving force behind strike behavior. Drawing on the community bonds that were forged through the Agnes flood, one reader criticized local strikers for undermining the gains that were made in the intervening six years.

In June, 1972, Wyoming Valley was devastated from mountain to mountain by a flood, the worst national disaster in history. It was the faith, love, determination and will of the citizens, plus the generosity of the federal

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the *Times Leader* does offer now an anonymous call-in line from which they publish messages left on the office answering machine. The feature is called “Say So” and is wildly popular among readers, despite the fact that most agree the anonymity of the messages undermines their credibility (and tends to bring out the extremists on a variety of volatile issues—e.g. racists can be open about their racism without fear of being publicly identified by co-workers or neighbors as such

government and kindness of outside people who are [sic] responsible for the rebuilding and beautification of the Valley.

For many, the coming holidays would have been the best since 1972. But now, to dampen that thought a cloud hangs over the Valley because of the present violent strike conditions which exist at the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Co.

...Strikes, and especially violent ones, solve no problems. The present strike is not only touching the lives of strikers but every family and business [in the Valley]. This holiday season would probably be a banner year for stores in Wilkes-Barre but a great gloom has been cast over that prospect because of the strike.

...I had been a member of a union for many years and realize they have done a great service for the working man, but now the violent attitude of strikers, prompted by the national union aides, is doing a disservice to the union members. If truth were known, probably 75% of the union members on the picket line choose not to be there.

...And isn't it unbelievable that some of [the newspaper carriers] were threatened? National union negotiators and violent strikers have a lot to answer to our young people today. —Interested Citizen (Letter to the Editor #1, *Sunday Independent*, November 5, 1978)

As a former union member, the writer's *ethos* reflects an interesting balance of insider/outsider status. On the one hand, if the mantra "once a union member, always a union member" is accurate, there is a resonance in the writer's claims about community "service" and the fact that there is strong likelihood that many picketers would rather not be participating in the public demonstrations. On the other hand, the past tense references to union membership, coupled with the anonymity of the letter itself might lead readers to see the source as someone who crossed the picket line at the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Co. and who currently works for the *Times Leader*.

But references to the positive changes that ensued following the Agnes flood certainly point to insider knowledge of history and the impact the experience had on all residents. The writer notes the inherent conflict in the assumption that "outsider" influence is necessarily negative, given the important aid people in the area received from the federal government and the "kindness of outside people." Indeed, while much of the rhetoric assumes skepticism of all those who are not residents, this writer argues that such a position is, at the very least, short-sighted, and perhaps even illogical. Wilkes-Barre recovered from its worst natural disaster



only with the aid of “outsiders.” This message links in an interesting way with references made to the impact of the flood made by Reverend Ayers and others who openly supported the strikers. While the flood from the union workers’ perspective was yet another great example of community members coming together as family born of circumstance, this letter to the editor suggests that coming together happened not just internally but with the help of external forces. It seeks to broaden the community recognition of the outcome of the flood while it rearticulates what “family” is. In this sense, “family” and “solidarity” does not necessarily exclude well-intentioned people from outside the Wyoming Valley.

In another unsigned letter to the editor, the writer again decries the violence and its potential effect on the community at large.

I’d like you to know that not everyone agrees with the way the pickets, cops and passersby are acting.

I’m sick when I see people asking for ‘human dignity’ for themselves but denying it to others.

What a rotten example for our children.

Mob violence ruling, police looking the other way, harassing the trucks themselves by giving unwarranted tickets, letting property be smashed and people fearing for their safety.

People are observing this, and while they may be fearful, in their hearts they are dismayed by it...

Something stinks and right now I think it’s coming from the outside of the building, not the inside.

God help all of you people in there working. I admire your courage, believe me. (Letter to the Editor #2, *Times Leader*, November 4, 1978)

The community member who wrote this letter makes an unusual link with the concepts of “insider” and “outsider” status. While to this point, “insider” has exclusively denoted community resident, union member, or *Citizens’ Voice* employee, this writer suggests that to be “inside” actually may be the opposite—*Times Leader* and Capital Cities employees. Those on the “outside” are the picketers, and I do not think that the reference to being outside the building is unintentional. The writer seems to imply that picketers are “outside” the bounds in several respects. Thus, while the reference certainly links with previous messages offered by the picketers themselves, it challenges the notion of what constitutes “inside” and “outside” the community as a whole. Wilkes-Barre residents may read

this and respond by asking themselves which persona they prefer to identify with, and therefore the issue is no longer longevity or residence status in the Valley, but rather how one's actions reflect the long-held values of a community. Might a "scab" from Kansas City or Fort Worth actually reflect more of what Wilkes-Barre is about than a lifelong resident who throws paint bombs at the side of a downtown building?

In keeping with this questioning of community perceptions, another anonymous writer labels the behavior of the strikers as precisely what the community wants to avoid.

It is lamentable that outside labor 'goons' were imported to precipitate the actions which led to the damage and destruction of newspaper property. Unfortunately, in the final analysis, the local union members of the newspaper now on strike must bear the burden of guilt.

I am sure these local union people are peaceful members of our community. It is regrettable and hooliganistic activities of outside interests [that have] provided the impetus to the local strike.

One wonders at the lack of local police intervention. It appears that their sympathies interfered with their official duties, shamefully so. If the police were unable to cope with the disturbances, one wonders further why the state police were not summoned.

I will stand up and be counted as one who affirms the right of any union to strike in order to improve wage and working conditions. Justification of the strike is not the issue here. It is the activities bordering on anarchy which I do not condone and will not. (Letter to the Editor #3, *Violence in the Valley*, November 28, 1978)

Once again, it is interesting to note how the author of this message interprets the concept of "outsiders." In this case, the outsiders are those labor activists brought in from other cities to "precipitate" the strike violence. Again, outsider status does link with space and residency—people not from the Wilkes-Barre area—but the link challenges the idea that the majority of these outsiders are among the corporate owners and *Times Leader* employees. The author reiterates what writers at the *Times Leader* have also contended, that there are "outsiders" on both sides of the picket line; indeed, "outside" interests seem to drive the dispute as a whole.

However, this letter works to establish a certain middle ground and acceptance among supporters of the strikers, as did the author of the first letter to

the editor I cited. In the first letter, the author identifies him or herself as a former union member. In this case, the author declares allegiance to unions in general by noting he or she will “stand up and be counted as one who affirms the right of any union to strike...” Both writers clearly believe an open allegiance to at least the concept of labor unions is a necessary rhetorical strategy in order to be heard among strikers and their supporters. By establishing a link in this manner, both letters stand a better chance of effectively driving home the larger points of dismay about how the strikers are conducting themselves and the greater (negative) impact upon the community as a whole.

This third letter to the editor works also to excuse—at least on some level—the actions of “local” strikers, asserting that they are, by and large, “peaceful.” This position is necessary for the author in order to comfortably assume the collective ownership stance in paragraph #2 (“our community”). If, as the statement seems to indicate, community members are individual parts of a larger “peaceful” collective that denounces “hooliganistic” behavior, then presumably the agitators are those from the “outside.” The author condemns the violence and avoids direct local association with it. At the same time, all blame does not appear to rest exclusively on the shoulders of outside “goons.” Instead the author also maintains that regardless of the individual responsibility for specific violence, all local strikers bear some responsibility for the emotional turn the strike has taken. Solidarity, in this case, means that even if you don’t personally toss the paint bombs onto the *Times Leader* building, if you stand behind those who do (or choose not to condemn those who do), you bear some responsibility for the damage.

In perhaps the most interesting link in this rearticulation of insider/outsider character, Rev. Jule Ayers reappears over a month after his first public statement in the pulpit (and subsequently printed in the first issue of the *Citizens’ Voice*). On November 11, 1978, supporters of the striking labor unions staged a public rally in downtown Wilkes-Barre, at which several community leaders spoke and offered encouragement to the families of strikers. The rally was ostensibly in celebration of labor in general, but clearly underscored the local dispute. To open the labor rally, Rev. Ayers was asked to offer the invocation. He did so and sent the text to the

*Times Leader* to "print if you are moved and inclined to do so." The editors at the *Times Leader* opted to do so the following week.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Thank you God, for this day, for this event, for the health that we have, and the cause that binds us together. By our efforts, and with Your help, we have served, struggled, and survived. What we have achieved, our Father, over the years, represents corporate enterprise, governmental processes, and our own hard work.

We confess that we feel pressures from every direction which strain our pocketbooks, our patience and our sense of justice. We know that there are times when all of us have been apathetic, satisfied with ourselves, and with things as they have been. In changing and new circumstances, we are outraged. Yet we are prone, all of us, to labeling, over-reacting, grandstanding, and demagoguery. We are exiles from unity with one another.

Grant that negotiations in good faith will be conducted, in which job security, legal and moral considerations, and sufficiency for the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company and for the Council of Unions will be the order of the day. With Your divine wisdom, guidance and patience may company, labor and government representatives keep talking, keep defining what can and cannot be changed and keep listening to the hopes and needs of you and me and of this community.

Let us have perspective on ourselves and on proposals made—that there may be non-violence, law enforcement, and obedience even when it hurts not to strike back. Enable us, and others, to work at being part of the answer rather than part of the problem. Deal charitably with those who contend against us. Cause us to remember that You care for them, and theirs, as well as for us and ours. Out of this struggle may there come to be a newspaper, of which we shall be more proud than ever before. May it be great not only in what it prints, but in what it is, and what it represents. To the prophet's admonition, "seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God," we dedicate ourselves this day. Amen. (Invocation given by Rev. Jule Ayers, Minister of the First Presbyterian Church, Wilkes-Barre, November 11, 1978).

In keeping with his original message on October 8, Ayers still affiliates himself and much of the community with the strike cause. Given his audience at the time he delivered the invocation, his alignment with the strikers' position was logical. But Ayers makes it clear that the community is part of the labor dispute, at the very least because they are part of the larger discussion taking place on the streets and in the newspapers.

The collective “we” pronoun in paragraph 2, for example, reflects the perspective of the striking workers and those who support them. While the “we” Ayers refers to as feeling the pressure on pocketbooks and a uniform sense of frustration *could* relate to both sides of the dispute, it probably doesn’t given the fact that the rest of the paragraph goes on to talk about “our” reaction to change. The reaction to change is a clear identifier of community members who resisted—even before contract negotiations broke down—new management efforts of Capital Cities. Though local skepticism was in the air almost as soon as the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company sale was final, change wasn’t an issue for Capital Cities executives, *per se*. Acquisition of new media outlets was old hat to the corporation by this time—change was the norm. It was the Wilkes-Barre community, and more directly the newspaper employees, who anticipated and were “outraged” by the prospect of change.

But in his invocation Ayers points out some equal shortcomings in both appeals. This message varies somewhat from his first public statement that sought to assign much more responsibility for the city’s tensions to the Capital Cities executives, “Many workers feel that the owners of the paper must think of us as animals...We’ve never seen such a posture as this” (“We Deserve Better,” *Citizens’ Voice*, October 9, 1978, 1). In that first message Ayers drew a distinct line between Wilkes-Barre community members and the outsiders associated with Capital Cities—the “us” did not include the new newspaper owners.

However, in his second message, Ayers notes that “all of us” are prone to “labeling, over-reacting, and grandstanding,” and this appears to apply to *both* sides of the dispute. Ayers also points out perhaps the most important issue that has emerged from the outsider/insider polarization—that we (and implied here is a collective understanding of “we” as *all* community members) are “exiled from unity with one another.” Despite the inclusive use of “we” in his statement, Ayers simultaneously acknowledges that there cannot be a “we” that encompasses all community members amidst the current divisiveness and tension. In fact, he further divides the stakeholders groups in his reference to “the hopes and needs of you and me and this community.” *This community* does not suggest necessarily a solitary, agreed-upon, fixed need, but rather something more individually defined and

varied consistent with the “you” and “me” single-individual reference that precedes it.

Despite his acknowledgement that *both* sides are guilty of “labeling and over-reacting,” Ayers still consciously separates the Wilkes-Barre community from decision-makers with the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company, and privileges the former over the latter. When he asks God in his invocation to “deal charitably with those who contend against *us*” and to “cause *us* to remember that You care for *them* and *theirs*, as well as for *us* and *ours*” (emphasis mine), Ayers contends that there is a distinction between the groups. His reference to the others—them and theirs—indicates an understanding of the Capital Cities representatives that is consistent with his first public statement in the preceding month. *They* are still very much separate (and different) from us, despite his acknowledgement that God cares for both groups. In fact, it is noteworthy that Ayers first points out the contention against *us* before he acknowledges the equal treatment from God.

Ayers stretches the concept of negotiating in “good faith,” and, without mentioning the bridge building metaphor he used in his first address, he pushes readers/listeners to understand that a positive conclusion to the strike can only occur if both sides agree to compromise in their demands. The context for his advocacy of listening and being “part of the answer” instead of “part of the problem” likely comes from the fatigue and anxiety the community was already feeling from the strike violence over the preceding month. At this point in the strike, many had been sent to the hospital from a variety of skirmishes that occurred on or near the picket lines, and the brutal beating of Wackenhut security man, John Burgess, on October 25 had shocked residents. Ayers’ message, as a result, pushes both sides to find acceptable middle ground and to turn the other cheek, in a way that his first message did only to a lesser degree. This urgency is directly linked with the violent events community members observed—sometimes first-hand—during October.

As I pointed out earlier, the coverage the *Citizens’ Voice* gave to the strike rarely acknowledged the violence perpetrated by the strikers, and if community members didn’t witness it first-hand (many did, of course) or see it on the television news, they may not have known about a good portion of it. The writers of the *Times*

*Leader* believed community members needed to be fully informed about the impact the strike was having on Wilkes-Barre. In *Violence in the Valley*, educating readers about the realities of strikers' tactics is a chief objective, and an entire section of the tabloid is dedicated to what editors dubbed "the toll of violence." The stories of violence that the *Times Leader* published again did not use names (as was the case with the letters to the editor). The editor's note said the names of the employees who experienced or witnessed the violence had been withheld "for their protection from further harassment," so there is no way for readers to verify the accuracy or authenticity of the accounts. Their weight in helping to advance readers' perspectives on the strike and the community as a whole is therefore difficult to determine. Nevertheless, the purpose of the messages is to extend the community's scope of understanding and to link with prior knowledge/experience, which they do at least partially because of the level of detail offered in the accounts.

I was among a group of employees who were leaving the...building. As we started to walk out the front door of the building toward the van which was parked curbside...there was a group of pickets standing on the sidewalk...

I...walked about ten feet directly toward the open door of the van. At that point one of the pickets...stepped directly in front of me, blocking my path into the van. He spat directly into my face several times...and was waving his arms while blocking my path into the van.

Trying to get past...I placed my left hand on his left shoulder and stepped around him. As I passed him going toward the open door of the van, he said, 'Nobody lays a hand on me' and I was immediately hit very hard in the back of my head...I had a very painful lump on the back of my head and I was very lightheaded. —A 24-year-old female employee ("The toll of violence," *Violence in the Valley*, November 28, 1978)

When the writer identifies the age and gender of the employee who was assaulted by the picketer, it becomes the only instance among all stories of violence published in *Violence in the Valley* in which so much detail is offered. In fact, there are no identifying features of any of the people who offer subsequent accounts. I could locate no one at the *Times Leader* who could explain this anomaly. The fact that this identifying information was not removed may simply have been an oversight. Or, it is also possible that the editors thought the fact that the worker was a young woman would shock and possibly outrage readers. Such an appeal would

rely on the same sort of social outrage that resulted from reports of picketers harassing newspaper carriers who were children. So whether it was a rhetorical strategy or a copy editing oversight, readers are offered an opportunity to envision the scene even more clearly in this instance.

Perhaps equally important is the anonymity of the picketer who assaults the young woman. The only thing we are clear about is the fact that he is male. The lack of detail is important inasmuch as readers cannot be assured that he isn't one of what Rev. Ayers might call "our own." While Ayers feels sure that the majority of those who have perpetrated the violence are outsiders, we are offered no such assurance in this description. The effect is likely to be unsettling to readers who may wonder if the perpetrator in this case is someone they know.

Finally, this narrative also links with previous accounts offered in *Citizens' Voice* articles that suggest picketers are more often injured by the vans that barrel past them through the gates. While the young woman's account does not challenge the veracity of such a claim, in this instance, the van idles "curbside," in what could be construed as a non-aggressive stance. The two perspectives (security aggression versus striker aggression) do not cancel each other out, but amidst the tension between opposing images of violence encourage readers to make links that create a new understanding of the scenes in downtown Wilkes-Barre.

We were looking out the side windows into the alley...at the pickets...Shortly after, they broke through the gate and ran into the alley...I saw about three or four people slinging various items at the windows and breaking the windows. One man carried a fire extinguisher and he squirted it and then several times he picked it up and threw it into the windows. A garbage can and a helmet were also thrown into the windows...At no time did I see the police come in and try to stop this...The police closed the gate, however, after the people left the alley. ("The toll of violence," *Violence in the Valley*, November 28, 1978)

The reference this speaker makes to lack of police response is a reoccurring theme in several *Times Leader* stories in this tabloid. In fact, not long into the strike, the Wilkes-Barre police force was the focus of an FBI investigation that eventually led to the ousting of the police chief, who had openly declared his support of the strikers. If readers had little prior insight into the siege atmosphere at the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company plant, this account offers an important alternate



perspective. The details of the assault on the building are reminiscent of images from third world countries engaged in civil unrest. The weapons are everyday items—helmets, garbage cans—but used to shatter glass and break spirits. In addition, police inaction adds another layer of detail and “truth” to the larger picture Wilkes-Barre community members are forming.

If security is an important element to community identity, and that understanding of security is challenged, community members are forced to ask questions of what they know or believe to be true about the community as a whole. Prior to the publication of *Violence in the Valley*, the *Citizens' Voice* had openly criticized Capital Cities executives for bringing in the outside Wackenhut security forces, arguing that to do so was to anticipate (wrongly) local propensity for violence. As we have seen in several examples, strike supporters felt as though the precaution of the barbed wire fence and the use of Wackenhut guards was an affront to the character of residents in the Wyoming Valley; they believed they were being seen and treated as “animals.” However, when readers learn through *Violence in the Valley* articles that normal security forces (local police) have done little or nothing to stave off the violence or protect Capital Cities employees from harassment, public attitude about security (and possibly about the Wackenhut forces) has the potential to shift.

In another story, *Times Leader* writers detail more specifically how local police did, or rather did not, respond to repeated requests from Capital Cities executives to protect the property and employees from increasing harassment and striker violence. The writers choose to chronicle specific events by date in standard police blotter reporting style.

Oct. 6—A Wackenhut guard saw pickets throwing rocks over the fence he company had constructed to protect the property. The guard called to a police officer standing nearby for help. The officer refused, saying to the guard, ‘I’ll shoot your m— f— ass’”

Oct. 7—A van tried to leave the plant. Several pickets blocked the van and refused to move. When the van tried to move forward, a picket fell to the ground, saying he had been struck by the vehicle and hurt. Police charged the van driver with intent to do bodily harm.

Oct. 8—A nine-vehicle convoy tried to leave the company property to deliver papers. Approximately 30 pickets blocked the front gate. Four or five police officers present refused to move the pickets. A company attorney

called the police chief who also refused to help. He said he feared the police could not control the situation. He said there would be a riot if the company continued to try to move the trucks out the gate.

Oct. 13—Pickets repeatedly came onto company property, smashing windows in the building and breaking windshields and slashing tires on company vehicles. No strikers were arrested. Police later arrested a guard for allegedly spraying strikers with a fire extinguisher. He was held on \$5,000 bail. The charge was dropped after the guard proved he had not arrived in Wilkes-Barre until two days after the incident occurred.

Oct. 15—A company van full of employees was followed by three cars driven by strikers. One car tried to stop the van by blocking the street in front of it. The van driver tried to pull around the car to get away. The car following behind the van rammed the back of it, then went out of control and ran into a pole. Fearing his passengers were in danger, the company driver drove away. A police officer charged the driver with leaving the scene of an accident. ("How the police reacted," *Violence in the Valley*, November 28, 1978)

The tone of these accounts is matter-of-fact and facts appear to be reported objectively. This is consistent with a goal that *Times Leader* management set for the newspaper: to reflect a more professional, objective newspaper style in all of its coverage. While the details of violence and police response aim to educate Wyoming Valley community members about a side of the strike of which they possibly weren't aware, the presentation of the material avoids overtly sensationalizing the happenings. The tone of the *Times Leader* story differs somewhat from the more emotional, fractious tone established by the *Citizens' Voice*.

Despite the importation of about 200 security policemen from all parts of the United States, Capital Cities Communications, Inc., publishers of the *Times Leader Evening News, Record* was seeking protection from Pennsylvania state police.

According to a report from state Rep. Bernard O'Brien, who represents the City of Wilkes-Barre in the General Assembly, A. DeWitt Smith, president of Cap Cities, telephoned O'Brien Saturday morning at 4.

He asked O'Brien if he would get Pennsylvania State Police to protect the 200 invaders to Wyoming Valley, plus scabs and strikebreakers who were on the premises of the publishing company. ("State Police Protection Sought," *Citizens' Voice*, October 9, 1978, 3)

The writers for the *Citizens' Voice* do not bother to mask the obvious contempt they feel for the company that asks for protection for the "200 invaders to the Wyoming Valley" (emphasis mine) as well as the "scabs and strikebreakers." The language immediately differentiates the outsiders, the non-native presence in the

community, from those who rightfully belong. The word "importation" also communicates emotion. The tone doesn't even pretend the sort of objectivity that the *Times Leader* writers in the previous piece try to establish. Indeed, even the visual design of the *Citizens' Voice* page in this case suggests an "in" with the police. Just above the story about DeWitt seeking protection from the state police, is a photo with a long cutline acknowledging a separate event at which the Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge 43, is set to honor eight retirees.

Because the *Citizens' Voice* story ran October 9, 1978, and was distributed to a large audience (over 45,000), it is safe to say that the community would understand the relationship between strikers, union representatives, and local police as favorable. In fact, readers are given little cause to see this as necessarily remiss. In the ensuing month and a half, however, after a great deal more violence had erupted, an investigation into the Wilkes-Barre police department had begun, and the end of the strike was nowhere in sight, the *Times Leader* writers saw an opportunity to offer a new spin on the concept of "security." The *Times Leader* story, which ran November 28, 1978, and was distributed by mail to 50,000 households, used sworn statements and direct quotes to redefine "security" in Wilkes-Barre. Never is there a direct reference to the *Citizens' Voice*, but it is clear that the messages both have developed are aimed at each other as much as they are at educating the community. Though separate messages, they do link temporarily in this struggle to articulate the nature of security in the Wyoming Valley.

In between the two public practices illustrated here, the President of the Mt. Lebanon Township Police Association wrote an open letter to the *Times Leader* condemning the Wilkes-Barre police for their inaction in the case of the John Burgess attack October 25. It is important to note here that Burgess was employed by the Mt. Lebanon Police force; thus, his assault was regarded as an affront to the entire squad. The *Times Leader* published the letter as a letter to the editor and then again ran it opposite the story "How the police reacted" in *Violence in the Valley*. The original letter was dated November 2, 1978.

...We of the Mt. Lebanon Police Association deplore the conduct of the pickets who attacked a young security guard who was only doing his job. Mr. Burgess was there to protect executives of the plant and was not performing in any other capacity. However, as a dedicated individual, and a

policeman, he could not stand by and allow a group of animals to injure someone without taking a hand in it. The pickets, on the other hand, acted with violence as their guide and turned on Mr. Burgess in the classical sense in which mobs or such trash operate.

At the same time the Wilkes-Barre Police, located just across the street, took ten to fifteen minutes to arrive on the scene of this altercation. The lack of professionalism of law enforcement shown by the Wilkes-Barre Police makes us ashamed to call them police officers. The job of a police officer is to be impartial and protect the rights of all people. It is our understanding that your police department feels that it must protect the rights of the pickets above all else. We of the Mt. Lebanon Police Association condemn not only the union involved, but the Wilkes-Barre Police Department for this violent criminal act. (Koller, Letter to the Editor, *Violence in the Valley*, 28 Nov. 1978).

John Koller's letter adds to community members' perception and ongoing discussion of security from an outsider's perspective on Wilkes-Barre. In his condemnation of police inaction and strikers' behavior, Koller encourages readers to examine how outsiders might view the Wilkes-Barre community. In fact, in his labeling of strikers as "animals, mobs, and trash," it is likely that some community members' worst fears are realized. Not only are *insiders* becoming more and more aware of the behaviors and attitudes associated with the strike, but people on the other side of the state (Mt. Lebanon is 286 miles west of Wilkes-Barre, located near Pittsburgh) are now weighing in on the situation. As the President of the Police Association—an organization widely respected and presumably one that should have some authority on the issue of security—Koller's position must have some influence on Wilkes-Barre community members' self-perception. It's a little like being called to task for your boorish behavior at a party while surrounded by people you want to make a favorable impression on.

On the other hand, many of the public practices and insights offered by individuals also suggest that Wilkes-Barre residents prefer to handle problems internally. As evidenced by the apparent distrust of outsiders, whether they are Wackenhut security forces, Capital Cities executives from New York, labor representatives from Washington D.C., FBI authorities, or simply police officers from the other side of the state with an opinion, Wilkes-Barre community members tend to place more value on what the next door neighbor, the religious leader, the

Chief of Police or the downtown business owner have to say on the local issues, primarily because they are Wilkes-Barre community members.

While links are certainly forged across public practices, some of which are initiated by non-community members, the negotiation or struggle for dominance lies primarily with those locals whose stake in the outcome is larger. Interestingly, many of those stakeholders who come from outside the community have more to say publicly than the locals. But Wilkes-Barre residents seem to acknowledge—as seen in much of the skeptical rhetoric that is attached to the “outsider” status of many players in the strike—that when all is said and done, the executives, the labor union representatives, the security forces, and even the imported Capital Cities newspaper workers will all eventually leave the city when their jobs are concluded. It is the community residents with a commitment to Wilkes-Barre who must live with the aftermath and outcome of the strike. Thus, it seems logical that while the outside stakeholders continue to dominate the public negotiation of perception, the strike cannot feasibly be resolved. Their struggle, largely with one another, is about the strike, not about the community as a whole. As it turned out, of course, the strike continued—and the chasm between the two newspapers and social ripple effect across the community widened—until the “outsiders” left the community or were more or less assimilated as residents.

### **Diaspora and Space: The Constitutive Nature of Displacement**

To the people who walked or drove past the company’s building, located about fifty yards from the city’s main shopping district, the atmosphere was that of a mine site preparing for a strike. The mine companies used to barricade and string barbed wire around their property and buildings when a strike loomed. (Keil, 81)

As I suggested in my opening story in Chapter 1, *space* and the resulting relationships people develop with specific locations can be important to community identity. When community members’ relationship with specific space is challenged, or if they face displacement, the tension or struggle against such change (or with new environments and social expectations) forces re-evaluation of identity. It is in this struggle that new articulations of *who we are* according to *where we are* begin to emerge.

Social struggle is most easily identified when physical, social, or economic change is imposed on a specific group within a community and those people resist change. Those who impose change have usually demonstrated prior success in domination, and community members have in some way acknowledged the power to enforce consequences for non-compliance with proposed changes. In the most extreme cases of physical displacement, community members are forced to flee to save their lives or avoid persecution. This is where the majority of scholars have focused our understanding of *diaspora*. But as I have already argued, the social dynamics that result from forced displacement on a smaller scale—in this case, the displacement of workers from the *Times Leader*—reflect the same sort of efforts at commemoration, communication of grief, and need for connection that are evident in more extreme cases of nation-building. The re-articulations of Wilkes-Barre as community may, in fact, begin with a figurative line drawn in the sand—the alteration of shared physical space in the downtown.

Like property lines or even borders of a country, the lines that divide people and their perceptions of “community” are often disputable—such lines frequently shift and change as they are negotiated and interpreted. Rarely do social, political, and even physical boundaries take such concrete form as a Berlin Wall. Even so, while the Berlin Wall did serve as a clear visual division between East and West Berlin, there was still a “gray” area—frequently referred to as a “no man’s land”—between the fence on the East side where the gun towers were located, and the wall itself. If an East Berliner chose to make a break for the West, she had first to clear the fence near the gun towers. Then, however, she would need to cross several dozen yards of field before she reached the actual wall to get through the other side. Technically, this space was east of the wall, making it East Berlin soil; however, once past the guard towers and fence, a runner’s status was undeniable and that space between the guard towers and the wall represented at least partial freedom. The concept of space, therefore, is largely relative according to an individual’s representation, interpretation, and identification of and with that space. Such is also the case in distinguishing the more abstract notion of the differences between public and private spaces. For example, a public arena might be understood in terms of the way it is delivered as much as how public the place is in

which the message is received. A newspaper article, for example, because it is a form of *mass communication*, may be regarded as highly *public* because it reaches so many. Clearly, if a story leads on the front page or the editorial page, we can assume a substantial audience will read at least a portion of that message, even if it is merely the lead or the first few paragraphs. Therefore, because it reaches thousands (if we're talking about a newspaper with a circulation of 45,000 or more as was the case in Wilkes-Barre), an article is certainly more public than it might be if the same message were delivered to a group of 25 assembled for a meeting. The newspaper is more of a public space in this case than a hotel meeting room, despite the fact that the message may be initially received privately (readers read the article over a cup of coffee privately in their own kitchen). Because it reaches so many, its public nature increases exponentially. In addition, though the message may be received privately, it has significant potential to be interpreted or represented publicly through discussion with others. For example, readers might discuss the article or the message with co-workers, in a classroom, or at church in a wider public field. For the newspaper, "space" is not a concept that pertains to its physical nature. A newspaper is merely folded paper small enough for the average reader to hold comfortably in his or her lap. A meeting room can be huge by comparison. However, in terms of the message the public and private natures of each are dependent upon access and use.

Thus, whether the space is an actual physical boundary (a border, an obstruction), a tangible location (a bar, an office, a wealthy neighborhood), or a theoretical notion of "public" or "private," community members require an orientation to space in order to place themselves socially, emotionally, and physically. The conflict between Capital Cities and union workers in Wilkes-Barre emerged from several separate but related issues, not the least of which was the issue of "turf." The concept of space in many iterations emerged during and after the strike in both public and private spheres. References in print as well as in interview transcripts to "safe space", "our space", and "home and neighborhood" were just some of the concepts articulated throughout and after the strike. The strike—which many contended stemmed from the intentional displacement of the *Times Leader* workers—resulted in anger, grief, and even fear in some cases, and

created, albeit briefly, *diaspora*. In the public practices that refer specifically to this displacement, community members make connections between history, space, movement, and circumstance to negotiate what the event meant to Wilkes-Barre's identity.

### **The barbed wire fence and a "Stalag 17" environment**

The concept of space became a point of conflict just prior to the strike when Capital Cities executives ordered the construction of a chain link fence to surround the *Times Leader* building and eventually to be topped with barbed wire. Effectively, then-*Times Leader* employees believed the fence signified a line drawn in the sand.

About six weeks before the strike, a neighboring newspaper, *The Wyoming Valley Observer*, published comments pertaining to the fence and its effect on the Wilkes-Barre community that likened the atmosphere to Nazi Germany. Some argue this was the first time the issue—and photographs of the fence itself—had been brought to the public's attention through the media, though numerous reports of contract negotiations and the Capital Cities purchase of the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company had certainly been reported previously (Keil, 81).

With negotiations underway between two unions and the new management, Capital Cities, Inc., employees expressed fears that the fence was erected for security in the event of a strike. A management spokesman termed the fence a routine security precaution, while a skeptical [*Times Leader*] reporter said it reminded him of Stalag 17 (Davies, Carl, "TLEN Staffers Question 'Security Moves'," *Wyoming Valley Observer*, August 20, 1978, p. 1)

If in fact this was among the first mass media mentions of the fence, the imagery had enormous power to shock community members, although, given its center-city location, many had likely already seen the fence first-hand. Particularly as juxtaposed against all of the progress made in the recent revitalization efforts downtown following the flood, a public comparison of downtown Wilkes-Barre with Nazi Germany might well have felt like a slap in the face to many community members.

The reference to "routine security precaution" by the management representative was typical of most public statements by Capital Cities executives



when questioned about the purpose of the fence, though these public statements were few and far between. Capital Cities later admitted that the fence had been a “public relations disaster” (Keil, 110) and that it communicated the wrong message to Wilkes-Barre residents. In fact, Capital Cities executives made very few public statements with respect to the fence and its purpose. Initially, as the *Wyoming Valley Observer* article highlighted, the new owners sought to “protect their investment”(1) and establish property lines, something they claimed to do with all new purchases. However, as some Wilkes-Barre residents noted, simple protection and routine security is not what the barbed wire atop the “property line marker” communicated. Capital Cities executives’ relative silence alongside the cacophony created by the striking workers (who sought every public opportunity to excoriate the corporation’s tactics) was evidence of difference in the negotiation process of the community identity. While strikers and family members and outside labor union officials sought opportunities to publish and make widespread verbal claims about the fence and its purpose, Capital Cities officials’ visual statements (the fence itself, the security forces, etc.) communicated how they saw Wilkes-Barre, and officials offered fewer verbal explanations/claims to the Wilkes-Barre residents.

What offended a lot of people was what the fence assumed about the people of Wilkes-Barre. The barbed wire alone said, ‘Those people are going to get violent and act like barbarians, so we better be prepared.’ The Cap Cities folks just decided the people of this Valley would do that. ...Of course, that is what happened, but I’m not sure it would have been so out of control if Cap Cities hadn’t put that thing in our faces. (Interview with former center city business owner: 5/17/99)

The fact that Capital Cities executives did not use much air or print space to carefully explain the motives behind the fence perhaps led some community members to assume how they were perceived by these “outsiders”. Erving Goffman notes “When we allow that the individual projects a definition of the situation...we must also see that the others, however passive their role may seem to be, will themselves effectively project a definition of the situation by virtue of their response to the individual and by virtue of any lines of action they initiate to him” (9). The unions had communicated through resistance in the early contract negotiations that they would strike before they compromised on job security issues; therefore, Capital

Cities' non-verbal statement was to erect the fence and the company's limited verbal justification effectively said, "You want a fight; we're ready." Both communicated perceptions of the community and their perceptions were communicated publicly. As a result, whatever negotiation was waged involved not just verbal articulations, but non-verbal ones.

This difference in rhetorical appeal—loud and indignant versus resolute and quiet—was indicative of the larger struggle throughout the strike for control of public perception and influence on community identity. Capital Cities was not completely silent, though. The magazine *Violence in the Valley* offered the *Times Leader* version of the events leading up to and throughout the strike to date. Articles suggested that *Citizens' Voice* union workers had been misled and manipulated by union leaders. But for the most part, Capital Cities executives offered little to compare with the public practices initiated by striking workers.

### **Timeline of Wilkes-Barre Newspaper Strike Preparations\***

\* sources conflict on exact dates for certain happenings— time estimates have been used in those instances.

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- **May, 1978**—Capital Cities, Inc. purchases *Times Leader*, *Evening News-Record* for \$10.6 million
  - **Early June, 1978**—Formal talks between union representatives and new corporate owners begin
  - **Late July, 1978**—Capital Cities executives erect 8-ft. fence around perimeter of Wilkes-Barre publishing Company's property.
  - **Early August, 1978**—Barbed wire added atop fence.
  - **September 25, 1978**—First signs begin appearing in windows around Wilkes-Barre businesses: "*Citizens' Voice*...Coming Soon!"
  - **September 29, 1978**—First contingent of approximately 12-15 Wackenhut security guards arrives in the offices of the *Times Leader*, *Evening News-Record*. Also, security firm sets up and installs internal/external security cameras.
  - **October 6, 1978**—Over two hundred Wilkes-Barre newspaper employees walked out of their offices and declared strike.

- **October 7, 1978**—Much larger contingent of Wackenhut security forces begins to come into town. Estimates range from 100-200 guards.
- **October 7, 1978**—*Times Leader, Evening News-Record* temporarily shut down because they are unable to get paper out to publish or distribute due to strike violence.
- **October 9, 1978**—First edition of *Citizens' Voice* union paper is published and delivered to more than 50,000 area homes.
- **October 16, 1978**—*Times Leader* resumes publication and distribution.

It is interesting to note the timing of some of the public messages as they pertain to the articulation process. For example, if we look chronologically at some of the public statements, we can see that the *Wyoming Valley Observer* comparison of the *Times Leader* offices to Stalag 17 came in direct response to the non-verbal message of the fence itself on August 20, 1978. In that same message, however, community members also see that an unnamed management spokesperson terms the fence a "security precaution." Within the same message, we see dissonance among public perceptions of the fence—Nazi control tool or "necessary" means to maintain safety. It is a full six weeks later that the more pointed references to the damaging effects of the fence begin to reach the public through the *Citizens' Voice* inaugural issue and Reverend Ayers' sermon. Clearly, by the time the strike ensued, the fence had become a symbol for a *misperception* of the nature of community members. It was regarded as insult, despite the fact that strike violence has certainly erupted, as Capital Cities executives had predicted. The messages and labels that emerge over time reflect evolving perceptions and struggle for dominance, though they do not refer directly to one another. While the "security precaution" claim from Capital Cities executives seems warranted given the violence that occurred, community members' feelings of insult indicate that the fence symbolized a chicken and egg argument. Had the fence not gone up, would the newspaper strike have erupted in violence as it did? Community members seem to indicate that no, it wouldn't have. If the community had not had a previous

history of strike violence during the mining era, would the fence have been seen as necessary? Capital Cities messages seem to suggest that no, it wouldn't have.

### **Long-term impact of the fence**

The specter of the fence and its implications for the striking workers in Wilkes-Barre lingered for years. In its ten-year anniversary edition of the *Citizens' Voice*, writers highlighted the history of the strike and the resulting "newspaper for the people." The way the fence changed downtown Wilkes-Barre space served as the metaphor for the decade old social divisions that resulted from the strike.

It all started with a fence.

The fence was the first sign and the first signal that the lives of hundred of people were about to change.

Ten years later, the changes are still occurring, and the greater Wyoming Valley community remains affected by that fence and what occurred in front of it and behind it...

The situation hit home when the fence began to rise. Why build a 10-foot fence topped with barbed wire? There had been no security problems at the newspaper in relatively crime-free Wilkes-Barre. Was there something more sinister afoot? ("It all started with a fence..." *Citizens' Voice*, October 7, 1988, C3)

Despite the intervening ten years, the "security precaution" fence still carries the pain of an open wound for *Citizens' Voice* writers. It represented something "sinister" behind which community-altering decisions occurred, and it appears important for this public forum to periodically remind community members of its effects. The *Citizens' Voice's* rhetorical appeal to maintain community indignation over the fence—even a full decade after it was erected—again reflects the value of open public space and suggests a message of "lest we forget..."

It was certainly in the best business interests of the *Citizens' Voice* to keep the image of the fence at the public fore. Obviously, the two daily newspapers competed head to head for advertisers and subscribers, but the *Citizens' Voice* campaign is also an overt effort to influence public perception of the events and of community identity. To remind readers of the insult and outrage suggests that Wilkes-Barre community members have enormous pride, tenacity, even loyalty.

Conversely, after the strike had ended, and the fence had eventually come down, the *Times Leader* never hearkened back to the time or the fence itself. The

news value had clearly passed, and it was not in the *Times Leader's* best interests to revisit the image that caused the newspaper so many problems with community relations. Indeed, the *Times Leader's* lack of attention suggests "forgive and forget," or at the very least "time to move on." There is a stoic sort of professionalism in this lack of acknowledgement on the *Times Leader's* part.

### **Giving voice to *diaspora*: layering public and less public reactions to the fence**

In addition to the articles that appeared in both newspapers (none of which used a by-line so were assumed to reflect the ideology of each newspaper) several individual voices emerged in the public discussion of the fence and its implications for the community. The strong reaction by many community leaders gave voice to *diaspora* and the need to connect across cultural lines. Paul Golias, Managing Editor of the *Citizens' Voice* was one of those community leaders, and while his words likely were incorporated in many of the articles printed in the newspaper at the time, his by-line was rarely if ever used during the strike. However, Golias did weigh in in several interviews. "That fence was terrible. Made me sick when I saw it because I knew what it meant. I knew there would be no compromise as soon as that thing went up" (interview: 4/15/99). While Golias made this statement in an interview with me more than 20 years after the strike, his sentiments about the fence—and those made in a much more public fashion—never changed. In a 1984 article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Golias told reporter Richard Scheinin something very similar, "'I come in here and see that fence, and my stomach flips,' says [Golias]. 'I knew that minute, that was it'" (Scheinin 15).

Other *Citizens' Voice* workers felt similarly and were extensively quoted in the media during the time of the strike. In addition, community members who witnessed the fence and all of the other security measures Capital Cities took prior to the strike, communicated strong feelings about what the fence meant on a social level. "Fences do not make good neighbors, no matter what anybody tells you. The fence was all about the beginning of the end," Tom Bigler, former news director for WBRE-TV channel 28. Interestingly, Bigler never felt he could speak out in his daily on-air editorials about the strike. "WBRE's offices had a huge glass front. I feared for the owner because I was afraid that whatever I said could lead to our plate glass

being damaged or worse. It wasn't *my* building to bargain with like that. So I stayed quiet, but I struggled with that for many, many years." (Interview with Tom Bigler 4/3/99)

While Golias could, and almost needed to be, much more public in his condemnation of the fence and what it represented than Bigler felt he could be, both agreed that the visual message had huge social implications for the community. The concepts of "the beginning of the end" and "no compromise" suggest that the space the fence cordoned off was as much ideological as it was physical. Prior to the strike, the *Times Leader's* property and grounds were regarded by community members and workers as public, but for many community members—and all strikers—the fence symbolized the end of *shared space* and redefined it as *disputed territory*. When this space was limited by the fence, indeed, when it became *altered* space, community members saw the gesture not only as a signal of impending failure in the labor talks, but as the acknowledgement of (for some, even the challenge to) future violence.

Some public reactions to the fence, like those of Golias and Bigler, communicated outrage. Others called for alternatives and problem-solving. Reverend Dr. Jule Ayers, then pastor of the First Presbyterian Church located just off the public square in Wilkes-Barre, delivered what was widely regarded as an important public message about the strike in his sermon October 8 (the day before the first publication of the *Citizens' Voice* hit the newsstands). The First Presbyterian Church was and remains a formidable congregation in Wilkes-Barre, and has long been known as among the most influential protestant churches in the Valley. Ayers chose to use his pulpit that day to call for an effort to "build bridges" rather than erect fences.

Let us struggle to keep talking and to build bridges...We see guards from out of town and even out of Pennsylvania. We face barbed wire. Many workers feel that the owners of the paper must think of us as animals...It's hard to believe that there is any other purpose in mind than that of breaking the union itself. (Dr. Jule Ayers' sermon quoted in October 9 first edition of *Citizens' Voice*, page 1).

Clearly in this public statement—made even more so by its publication in the *Citizen's Voice* the following day—Dr. Ayers condemned the meaning behind the

fence and the space it occupied. By acknowledging that it represents a perception of “us” as “animals,” Ayers extends the spatial impact of the fence beyond the striking workers and to the community as a whole—all listeners at the Presbyterian Church that Sunday and readers the following Monday were clearly *not* workers, but certainly *were* community members and therefore included in the use of the word “us.” Thus, the insult of the barbed wire extended far beyond just those associated with the newspaper unions.

Such a statement also resonates with recent history in its reference to the “bridge.” While it is clearly a metaphor in this case, it is important to remember that Wilkes-Barre faced being nearly completely cut off from neighboring communities because of the devastating Agnes flood just six years prior to the strike. The losses from that disaster were still very fresh, and the “bridge” associated with the major construction on the new Cross Valley Expressway, as well as the newly replaced North Street Bridge, actually reconnected the community to the rest of the world in a very physical way. Bridges were seen as symbols of healing in the community, putting back together that which natural disaster tore apart. A fence would naturally be seen as an obstruction to clear paths, perhaps even more to anyone who had lived in Wilkes-Barre during the flood.

In its inaugural issue, the *Citizens’ Voice* pointedly criticized (in eight separate references) the fence around the *Times Leader*. Like Ayers, writers for the *Citizens’ Voice* drew on community experience with the flood recovery process to further illustrate the insult of the physical barrier and to draw readers in.

Guards are posted at all outside entrances, inside doors, and various offices. Plus, in downtown Wilkes-Barre where \$160,000,000 (\$160 million) has been spent to beautify the city, Capital Cities has degraded Central City with a barbed wire fence. The fence is eight feet high and then heightens with three strands of barbed wire. We call upon Capital Cities to remove this ugly sight. (“Insult to Community,” editorial in *Citizens’ Voice*, October 9, 1978, 4).

The reference to the \$160 million in federal and state funds earmarked to aid in the recovery from the Agnes Flood plays on a source of pride for community members. The Agnes Flood was regarded as one of the nation’s worst natural disasters at the time, and the federal funding that flowed to the area was

unprecedented. Wilkes-Barre leaders had taken great pains in the ensuing six years to rebuild the downtown, which was particularly hard hit (it is only one block from the river). Task force and Chamber of Commerce leaders had hired well-known developers and architects to plan and rebuild the area using the most modern aesthetic appeals they could (community members often pointed to the stylish, sleek light fixtures, transit system shelters, public benches, and storefront awnings as the evidence of this renewal). Thus, a fence—particularly one meant to *keep out* local strikers—would be seen as an aesthetic and a social blight on the renewed and revitalized downtown. The *Citizens' Voice* writers counted on readers to identify not only with the moral degradation the fence represented, but also with the fact that it cheapened what the community had worked (and spent millions) to reconstruct.

If we look at the different public criticisms of the fence, we can see not only unified disdain for its purpose and impact, but certain differences as well. It is in these differences that public negotiation of identity occurs. For both Golias and Bigler, what the fence represented was certainly something negative, a source of tension. In Golias's eyes, it also represented a very personal loss—enough to cause physical as well as emotional response. But both Golias and Bigler responded in personal terms, with which readers may or may not identify. Technically, the personal loss was felt most by those 204 *Times Leader* workers who walked off the job. In terms of the percentage, those most directly affected by the strike were small in number if compared with the rest of the community. Thus, the first-person, emotional responses, while certainly telling and sometimes wrenching, did not necessarily reflect a *shared* experience. And while Golias's comments were public—he was frequently seen as a very public spokesperson for the workers at the *Citizens' Voice*, in part because of his position on the staff and in part because of his fiery personality—they could not reach the numbers of people that Rev. Ayers and the *Citizens' Voice* editorial page writers did. Similar to Golias, Bigler was (and remains) a very well-known figure in Wilkes-Barre, primarily because of his former leadership at the local television studio. He is widely respected to this day. But Bigler's comments were even less public than Golias's; in fact, he purposefully avoided any public comment at the time, and would only do so after the threat of



violence had subsided. Thus, the potential for public buy-in here was even further diminished.

The comments in Ayers' sermon, however, posit an alternative to simple condemnation of the fence by "building bridges" and encouraging community members to seek resolution. Here again the fence is deemed negative, but Ayers does not stop with mere criticism—instead, he calls for action. In addition, he refers to listeners (and readers) as part of the collective "us," which automatically assumes a shared belief among listeners. Ayers also refers specifically to shared community history as a means of encouraging audience identification with the notion that "we" (all members of the Wilkes-Barre community) can collectively solve the problem.

There used to be here in Wyoming Valley a labor-management-citizens committee...our aim was to prevent strikes. We worked before the state and federal negotiators were invited in. Sometimes those negotiators were embarrassed that we in the Valley could work out our own problems.

Our idea was that we all work not for, but with each other. We were determined to 'keep them talking' and to 'build bridges.'

...Maybe part of what we have to learn now is to have available, to trust and rely on such procedures, and not move so quickly to negotiators, lawyers, and fixed positions. ("We Deserve Better," *Citizens' Voice*, Oct. 9, 1978, 2)

Ayers' rhetorical move here invokes community history, communitarian ethics, and previous successes with problem-solving, while at the same time suggesting that "we" can solve the issues at hand more effectively than outsiders such as "state and federal negotiators" and "lawyers." It smacks of the old adage about "keeping it in the family." And again, this quote suggests that the fence is certainly an affront to the bridge builders—in spatial references, those from outside the community frequently incite "fixed positions," while keeping matters within the community allows "us" to "keep talking" (more fluid movement).

The communitarian ethic Ayers advocates here supports a mutual goal to work "with" each other for the betterment of the situation, as opposed to "for." The distinction is an important one because to work "for" clearly suggests a hierarchy that may or may not recognize or value all input equally. To work "with," however, suggests a more balanced playing field for all community members and opportunities for widespread input in the problem-solving efforts. He underscores

the importance of work ethic and efforts to head off problems before they spiraled out of control, clearly advocating for a return to this sense of the collective.

*Diaspora* and the need for relational networks is perhaps most easily linked to the practices that reflected the perspective of the striking workers. They were the people who felt threatened enough to move. We see links across these practices to recall important values, though not all draw from the same ideas or experiences. Though only a small number of people in Wilkes-Barre saw themselves as actually physically displaced because of the failed labor talks, this does not preclude the need for historical connections with space across the entire community. The social, political, and economic ties between those 204 workers and the rest of the Wilkes-Barre community were strong, and as we see in comments from Bigler and Ayers, the impact of the fence and Capital Cities' other security measures had a ripple effect.

#### **Other references to space in public practices**

While the image of the fence and what it represented for Wilkes-Barre residents in terms of division throughout the strike was indeed one important thread in the negotiation of community identity, it was not the sole identification residents (and non-residents) had with spatial issues. I have focused on it here because it was dramatic—and dramatized by the practices during and after the strike. In fact, there were also many references to “ownership” and “respect” for the downtown neighborhood space that reflected how the community saw itself. Although the *Times Leader* was relatively silent on the issue of the fence, the *Citizens' Voice* was in turn reluctant to cover much of the violence associated with the striking workers and the resulting property damage. Most of the *Citizens' Voice's* coverage of the strike violence focused on picketers who came in direct contact with security forces. For instance, when workers were sprayed with water hoses and fire extinguishers by Wackenhut Security guards, the *Citizens' Voice* decried the aggressive tactics of the forces.

Frank Ancharski is being assisted by ambulance attendants...after he was struck by a van of the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company on North Washington Street Friday shortly after midnight. Ancharski was taken to

General Hospital, according to Wilkes-Barre police. (photo caption, *Citizens' Voice*, October 9, 1978, 12)

This example from the *Citizens' Voice* illustrates the limited nature of its coverage of the strike violence. What readers do not see in this caption (or in any associated story) is why or how the victim in this case was struck. Most picketers found themselves in dangerous areas such as streets, driveways, and immediately in front of the entryway to the *Times Leader* building. It assumed readers would perceive the driver of the van as overly aggressive, if not homicidal.

But the *Times Leader's* tabloid, *Violence in the Valley*, offered an alternate story of strikers' behavior through numerous photos, articles, and letters to the editor. In many of the photos, strikers were clearly engaging in everything from launching paint bombs at the building, to slashing tires, to throwing themselves in front of vehicles. Management decided to mail approximately 50,000 copies to former subscribers (Scheinin 16), but given the sentiment in the Valley at the time, it would be difficult to determine how many of those recipients actually looked at or read the publication. At the time, few were reading the *Times Leader* at all. But even without widespread circulation or trust among community members, the *Times Leader's* message was sometimes one that community members could witness first-hand, and seeing was sometimes synonymous with believing.

...Many local businessmen thought the behavior of the strikers and their supporters confirmed the wisdom of having taken security precautions. One prominent city businessman, in talking about the people involved in the attacks on Capital Cities, said there was no excuse for the violence. In his opinion those responsible for it had behaved 'like animals.' (Keil, 111)

This reference to animalistic behavior had much to do with the defacement of the downtown property. It seemed to make little sense among some residents that fellow community members would actively destroy what they had helped to build. One retired downtown business owner I spoke with disputed what strikers contended, that it was other labor activists (who came from outside the community to support the strike) who were largely responsible for the vandalism. "I knew different. I watched people I know from church throw paint onto the building. I

could understand their anger, but this was their downtown, too.” (Interview with retired center city business owner, 5/17/99)

The retired business owner’s claim that the downtown belonged to the strikers reflects an emotional attachment to space. While not all strikers, of course, literally *owned* the buildings in question, as residents and people who worked within the Wilkes-Barre community, there was an assumption of emotional ownership and shared space. Acknowledging a “different” reality in this case indicates that other messages about who was responsible for the damage had certainly been received. This community member’s dispute with such messages illustrates a struggle to articulate another understanding of shared space and community members’ relationship to it.

These are just a few of the public messages that address the struggle over community identity and space. They are by no means exhaustive, but reflect the sort of links and tensions Hall notes as important in an articulation. The clear tension that arises from the physical displacement and resulting efforts to renegotiate identity in new space suggests that *diaspora* is indeed possible at the community level.

### **Re-articulating Behavior and Ethical Practice**

As we have seen in the public practices associated with issues of space and agency, many of the connections overlap. *Where are we* and *who are we* are sometimes questions that are not easily divorced from one another. For example, as I illustrated earlier, the ideas of “insider” and “outsider” raise questions about character, but fundamentally they also refer to the issue of space. Thus, it should come as no surprise to see the question *how are we supposed to be* draw from some of the same historical junctures and public practices. In keeping with the notion of *bricolage*, an examination of practices that attempt to negotiate acceptable social behavior and ethics will naturally also reflect concepts of space and character.

Why are ethics important? Values and how those values are reflected in our behavior have a great deal of impact on how we see ourselves and how we want others to see us. In the example I cited in the preceding section, John C. Koller,

President of the Mt. Lebanon Township Police Association, impugns not only the collective character of the Wilkes-Barre police, but also questions their ethics and values as officers charged with upholding the law. As Koller condemns the “lack of professionalism,” he raises the question of how Wilkes-Barre police behavior reflects on the community as a whole. Indeed, does protecting the rights of only select groups of community members suggest to outsiders that Wilkes-Barre is a dangerous place for anyone who isn’t home-grown?

But human rights and values—as evidenced by the constant reinterpretation of law—are always negotiated and context dependent. It is immoral, unethical and illegal to kill, says United States law and most religious doctrine. If one kills to save a child in immanent danger, it’s still illegal, but is it also unethical? We interpret values and determine acceptable social behavior based on what we understand about the circumstances at hand. What results is a rearticulation—again, never fixed—of who we are and how we believe we are supposed to behave.

Mackin’s notion that a functioning ecosystem supports its constituent members, and that its functioning members fill niches in the ecosystem to create a reciprocal relationship, is evident in many examples from Wilkes-Barre case. The ecosystem, which we may call the city’s physical location and relationship to the land and surrounding communities, serves as support for individuals within the city who come together for the purpose of establishing an ethical imperative for the community as a whole. In this case, that ethical imperative might be seen as furthering the cause of the working class, maintaining close “familial” ties in the face of adversity, or holding onto tradition. These individuals respond to circumstances within the ecosystem as a means of responding to specific social, economic, or physical change within the city, and do so from the vantage of personal investment in the collective. One type of response to circumstances surrounding the strike was an attempt to define and/or clarify specific practices.

For example, throughout the summer that led up to the strike, and when the *Citizens’ Voice* first hit the streets, corporate executives were demonized as the faceless New York-based entities who “forced local workers into the street” (*Citizens’ Voice*, October 9, 1978, 1) and refused to bargain in good faith with union

negotiators. The *Citizens' Voice* writers immediately defined the striking employees' goal:

...Get Capital Cities Communications, Inc. to the bargaining table in a reasonable, good faith posture. The four unions bargaining on behalf of the employees are pledged to good faith bargaining. ("Human Dignity Needs Support," *Citizens' Voice*, October 9, 1978, 1)

But the question becomes what is "good faith" bargaining. How do union workers determine whether the new owners are or are not behaving ethically in this case? Perhaps more importantly, when this serves as the primary print venue by which the majority of community members learn about the negotiations, how do *they* determine what is "good faith" and what is not? Writers for the *Citizens' Voice* leave little to chance when it comes to influencing public perception on this issue. The article goes on to detail company demands as unreasonable, indeed, unethical.

Capital Cities, of 485 Madison Ave. New York City, wants to impose working conditions that no man or woman would find acceptable.

The company wants to eliminate or weaken benefits which employees have had for decades.

The giant conglomerate is using blatant militarist tactics to force the employees to accept unacceptable contracts. ("Human Dignity Needs Support" 1)

No reader is likely to feel that stripping workers of benefits they've had for decades is ethical practice. In addition, writers for the *Citizens' Voice* count on readers to recognize the concept of "poor working conditions" as something akin to those experienced in the coal mines and other back breaking physical work associated with the area's history. Few will deem such expectations, no matter what the specific image conjured, as reasonable or fair.

But the article does little to outline specifically what the company executives have balked at. Readers are given no insight into specifically what benefits have been threatened or how the working conditions are unacceptable. Readers are only told that Capital Cities is engaging in an "archaic version of what a labor-management relationship should be" (1). It is a classic example of telling over showing. But readers have little recourse in this case, because at this point, the *Times Leader* cannot publish. Even when the publishing resumes, distribution is thwarted

and reader loyalty is lost. By default, it seems, the *Citizens' Voice* message and the voice of the strikers becomes the dominant reality in Wilkes-Barre. The new corporate owners are defined as "unethical".

The first published "statement" from the *Times Leader* emerges almost a full month after the *Citizens' Voice* dominance of the public screen. On November 6, 1978, the *Times Leader* dedicated nearly a full page to the "Publishing Company's Position Paper on Contract Talks." (Because of the length of this article, I have chosen to include it in the Appendix.) While it is full of very specific points of conflict and details of the contracts, it is also full of legalese and was unlikely to reach its intended goal to educate the public. Part of its failure hinges on its lack of savvy in design. The position statement is extremely long and the unbroken text body would be intimidating to the average reader. What the *Citizens' Voice* writers seem to already know is that the specifics of the dispute must be offered only in the most general layman's terms to community members, because despite the fact that they share mutual interest in the advancement of Wilkes-Barre, most readers are not "insiders" when it comes to the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company. The November 6 position paper does eventually offer a "final statement" which attempts to sum up the company perspective and goal, which seems to communicate a "good faith" posture. However, given its placement at the very end of an extremely long, dry account of specific items of contention, it seems unlikely most readers got to that point.

The Guild's previously announced position has been that it would not change 'a period, a comma, or a sentence' in the existing language [of the contracts]. We sincerely hope that the movement made by the Company will encourage the Guild to reconsider its position and that the Guild will now take positive, constructive and responsible action at the bargaining table in a genuine effort to reach an Agreement. Collective bargaining is a two-way street. The Guild must recognize the needs and desires of the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company if we are to achieve a speedy resolution of our differences. ("Publishing Company's Position Paper on Contract Talks," *Times Leader*, November 6, 1978, 2)

If a reader showed enough tenacity to get to this point in the article, he or she might question the Guild's seeming inflexibility in changing the existing language of the contracts. While Guild representatives had not to this point indicated they

would act on contracts with anything other than the best interests of the workers in mind, “good faith” to most means at least some give and take. As the position paper suggests, collective bargaining requires willingness from both sides to compromise in an effort to actually meet an agreement. If the Union representatives will not budge on *any* language changes, no “bargaining” can occur—at least, not in “good faith.”

Despite the fact that it misses its mark in terms of reaching a large audience in a persuasive and informative manner, readers who resisted being intimidated by legal terms and blocks of unbroken text would have learned a great deal about just how many compromises Capital Cities had made throughout the process. In fact, one anonymous letter to the editor shortly after the position paper was published, indicates that some of the details clearly did hit home:

After reading the contract terms of the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company in Monday’s *Times Leader Evening News-Record*, we finally find out what the human dignity issue is really all about.

The striking employees of [the newspaper] don’t have a job. They have a honeymoon. (Letter to the Editor #4, *Times Leader*, [reprinted] November 28, 1978)

One of the things that *Violence in the Valley* seems to recognize is that to communicate effectively with Wilkes-Barre readers, the facts of the case must not only be clear but also redefined. The writers at the newspaper argue that the stance readers take is obviously up to them; in fact, Wilkes-Barre residents clearly hold the power in determining who and what they want to be. But in order to do that, readers must have as much information as possible. Page two of *Violence in the Valley* works to redefine, or perhaps articulate for the first time, the company’s position on the strike. By offering new definitions of the problems at the negotiating table, *Times Leader* writers challenge community members to re-see the very concept of ethical and unethical behavior in Wilkes-Barre.

The dictionary says a strike is ‘the quitting of work by a body of workers to enforce some demand.’

If that were really what was going on in the Wilkes-Barre newspaper strike, you wouldn’t be reading this.

The story is not about a group of people leaving work—withholding their services to get a better deal.



The story is about unions that have tried by the most violent means to prevent a newspaper from being published.

The story is about unions which planned to publish their own newspaper long before the strike began and which have tried to threaten advertisers into using that newspaper.

The story is about a clever campaign to discredit the new owners of the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Co. before the owners had a chance to improve the newspaper and to unearth some of the things that were going on among its own employees. ("The Wilkes-Barre strike—our view," *Violence in the Valley*, November 28, 1978, 2)

Keeping in mind that redefining the impetus behind the strike will absolutely look like just what it is—the company view—writers encourage readers to make up their own minds about what is ethical in this case, but to do so by being skeptical of *all* information they're given.

You have a right to be skeptical. When you read [*Violence in the Valley*], look for what makes sense, what is documented, what your 'gut feel' is for the facts. We are not asking for your sympathy with the company in a labor dispute. Those are matters to be worked out at the bargaining table.

All we are asking is that you pay attention to what is happening in your own Valley...Whether you are a manager, a union member, a retired person or a housewife, the strike has an effect on the quality of your life in this area.

...We respect the right of the unions to strike. We intend to continue bargaining with them.

But we expect the unions—and the public as well—to recognize our right to continue our business.

That is our promise: to keep this newspaper coming out, to make it better, to make it a force for good in the Wyoming Valley.

We will do that despite threats and thugs. ("The Wilkes-Barre strike—our view," *Violence in the Valley*, November 28, 1978, 2)

By declaring the goal of the newspaper to become "a force for good" in the Valley, *Times Leader* writers imply that the *Citizens' Voice* and the union negotiators are working with an opposite ethical imperative. This is a direct counter-statement to some of the "forces of evil" rhetoric *Citizens' Voice* articles have aimed at Capital Cities executives in the preceding six weeks. Similar to the outsider/insider polarized arguments offered earlier, both newspapers try to influence readers' ethical stance and call into question whether community members will align themselves with the "good" or the "evil," though neither position is defined *per se*.

It is therefore incumbent upon community members to determine how to define “goodness” and how they want to reflect this attitude as a city.

The *Times Leader* seems to know that as a publication it cannot, nor should it, prescribe an ethical stance for the community. I suspect at least part of this comes from the fact that the early staff was filled with people who didn’t know Wilkes-Barre very well and had come from other cities. What the publication *can* do, however, is define the nature of Capital Cities, Inc. in a way that the *Citizens’ Voice*, Wilkes-Barre police, and local politicians cannot—from an insider’s perspective. So writers for the *Times Leader* work to paint a picture of a community-minded, service ethic for the corporation, a side to Capital Cities that Wilkes-Barre community members had not seen to this point.

Community involvement and service have characterized the operations of newspapers, television and radio stations owned by Capital Cities Communications, Inc.

...Special series, documentaries and programs printed and aired by Cap Cities newspapers, radio and television stations point out community problems and suggest solutions to improve the quality of community life. (“What is Cap Cities?” *Violence in the Valley*, November 28, 1978, 2)

The article then goes on to chronicle nine socially relevant projects initiated by communications outlets owned by Capital Cities including: a two-part study of parole conditions in New Jersey’s penal institutions; emergency programming aimed at helping travelers and rescue workers operating in blizzard conditions in Buffalo, New York in 1977; an emotional feature story about a mother in Belleville, Illinois, struggling to get help for her baby son dying of a congenital heart condition which resulted in readers sending money, offering transportation, and finding appropriate doctors for the family; and a news series on battered wives in Fort Worth, Texas, which inspired assistance programs from civic organizations. The civic-minded efforts of the media outlets highlighted in this article reflect an ethic of responsibility and community service that Capital Cities desperately needs to convey to Wilkes-Barre readers. The picture of the corporation here also suggests what it hopes for in Wilkes-Barre—that it can serve as a force for positive change. The examples writers use in this story also reflect at least a basic insight into Wilkes-Barre residents and their values. Writers count on readers identifying with the

importance of helping poor mothers with dying children, knowing first-hand about the dangers of blizzards, and valuing the importance of helping abused women.

When readers juxtapose this new articulation of Capital Cities as service-oriented “force for good” against the visual images of strikers causing damage to downtown Wilkes-Barre (as seen in one photo spread in *Violence in the Valley* and numerous single photos throughout) and stories of *Times Leader* workers being assaulted as they try to leave work, it would be natural for some to begin to question what ethical stance the community is reflecting. In fact, some letters to the editor suggest that the union message is beginning to weaken amidst the “evidence” that surrounds community members on a daily basis.

As far as I can see, the *Citizens' Voice* is the voice of the union. Everything I read in the *Voice* is not all the local citizens' voices, but the voice of the union. At first we were a little sympathetic but it really is getting out of hand.

As far as I'm concerned the unions are playing on the sympathy of the Valley with a Heart. Common sense should open their eyes...

The newspaper was in need of improving and the past few months' issues have been very nice...None of the allegations in the *Voice* have been substantiated. They keep harping over and over about the same things...(Letter to the editor #5, *Times Leader*, November 2, 1978)

The challenge to community members in this situation is to link the messages they have received from all outlets regarding social behavior and ethical imperative and to make an informed judgment about how they want to reflect the *ethos* of Wilkes-Barre as a city. Clearly, in this letter to the editor, the writer has been looking for better explanation, more details from the *Citizens' Voice* accounts of the strike and its position in the city. He or she is right to point out that local sympathy for the unions runs deep and this is a rhetorical appeal *Citizens' Voice* writers rely on consistently. But this rhetoric does not, as the writer argues, necessarily reflect the *true* voice of the individual community members and their values. In this case, perhaps “bargaining in good faith” is as much about how the newspaper communicated “truth” to community members as it is about what happens at the collective bargaining table.

Thus, while the ethical reciprocity seems consistent in the relationship between constituents throughout the city's history, it is also important to

understand how, over time and across contexts, identity is rearticulated. For example, if we examine consistent narrative threads communicating solidarity and allegiance to family through the coal mining era in the Wyoming Valley, the devastation of the Agnes Flood, the strike at the *Times Leader*, and more recent developments in public communication strategies, we can pinpoint links in verbal and visual strategies.

While the ideal of solidarity and commitment to family certainly is still evident today, locating the focal point for that commitment in the *Citizens' Voice* and its "independent workers" is perhaps not as accurate as it was twenty years ago. Today, the days of former friends crossing the street to avoid an altercation because of residual anger from the strike are waning. Perhaps the best conclusion to draw in this case is that while certain threads seem consistent in defining a community's identity, there are temporary links—points at which numerous contextual elements converge—which enhance or diminish in power to serve as a focal point for that definition.

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## Chapter 4

### Community Identity, Negotiation, and the Never-ending Story

Fast forward 24 years to the spring of 2002.

I teach journalism at Wilkes University, located just two blocks from Wilkes-Barre's Public Square—the site of so much violence and unrest in 1978. In spring 2002 my Advanced Newswriting class spent the better part of the term learning about “deep investigative” strategies and the local sources they can draw from to ask and answer appropriate, probing questions. One stop took us to the Luzerne County Courthouse and the Prothonotary's Office, where my students learned, among other things, how to research the lawsuits filed in the county.

Jill Moran, the newly-elected Prothonotary, generously walked my students through the ins and outs of the office and introduced us to our other guide—the courthouse reporter for the *Citizens' Voice*. He had been with the newspaper for several years and was clearly a well-known face among courthouse workers. Nearly everyone who walked by our group patted him on the back or greeted him by name. And no wonder; his office, after all, is really the courthouse. At least that's where he spends the majority of his working hours. Our *Citizens' Voice* court reporter was gregarious and enthusiastic, promising to show us a “typical day” in which he walked us through his own research processes in the records offices and the actual courtrooms on the floor above us.

Then something interesting happened. As Ms. Moran was demonstrating how to use the office numbering system for filing, she looked up and noticed someone else had entered the office. She smiled and greeted the youngish man by name and called him over to meet our group. He acknowledged our *Citizens' Voice* court reporter guide with a brief nod of his head, and looked slightly uncomfortable as he responded to Ms. Moran's request to join us. “This is our *other* familiar face in the courthouse. This is the *Times Leader* courthouse beat reporter, another good source for all of you,” she said, with a hand on his shoulder.



He shuffled his feet and mumbled hello. I noticed our *Citizens' Voice* reporter had distracted himself by briefly chatting with another office worker he clearly knew. Then, the Prothonotary said to the *Times Leader* reporter, "Hey! Why don't you join this group, too, and give [the *Citizens' Voice* reporter] a hand showing these young journalists the ropes? I know they'd appreciate your insights, too."

He blanched and literally raised his hands in front of him, as if to ward something off. "Oh no," he said, quickly noting that the other reporter's attention had returned to the group. "You guys can handle it. You don't need me. Besides, I'm due upstairs soon."

"Verdict and sentencing today?" our *Citizens' Voice* reporter asked.

The *Times Leader* reporter merely nodded with a half smile.

"See you up there, then."

And the *Times Leader* reporter disappeared through the double doors.

Later, as my group wandered out the door to our next research destination—the Wills and Deeds office—I spoke with our guide. "When I called the courthouse to arrange our trip, my contact sent me straight to you. I can see why; you seem to enjoy the teaching part of all of this with my students. But he never even mentioned the *Times Leader* courthouse reporter. I wonder why that is?"

The *Citizens' Voice* reporter shrugged, "I've been doing this for awhile, and you're right; I do enjoy it. I wouldn't have a problem if he [the *Times Leader* reporter] wanted to do it, though."

"He seemed a little uncomfortable about the idea," I said.

My guide smiled. "No, I don't think he would be uncomfortable with you or your students. It's just that he didn't want to step on *my* toes. See, we get along O.K. Things are a lot different now. We—people from both papers, I mean—will communicate with each other at council or school board meetings. And he and I will talk here after a case. In fact, we'll probably talk after we get out of the trial later today. Things have come a long way where that's concerned. But we're careful not to cross any lines. We're polite. There are things we can learn to appreciate, maybe even respect, [about the rival paper]. But the fact is, we are still trying to knock each other out of business. And there's this unspoken thing...history that never completely goes away. I think people have learned how to

behave and to live with each other. But they don't forget. Not for a long time, anyway." He paused then and thought for a moment. Then he added, "Besides, if your students ever decide to report in *this* town, I want them to learn how to do it the *Citizens' Voice* way."

The *Citizens' Voice* way.

The *Times Leader* way.

What does that mean almost a quarter of a century later? And how does the answer to that question help us to understand how the community members saw Wilkes-Barre...in 1978 and in 2003?

## Negotiating Community Identity

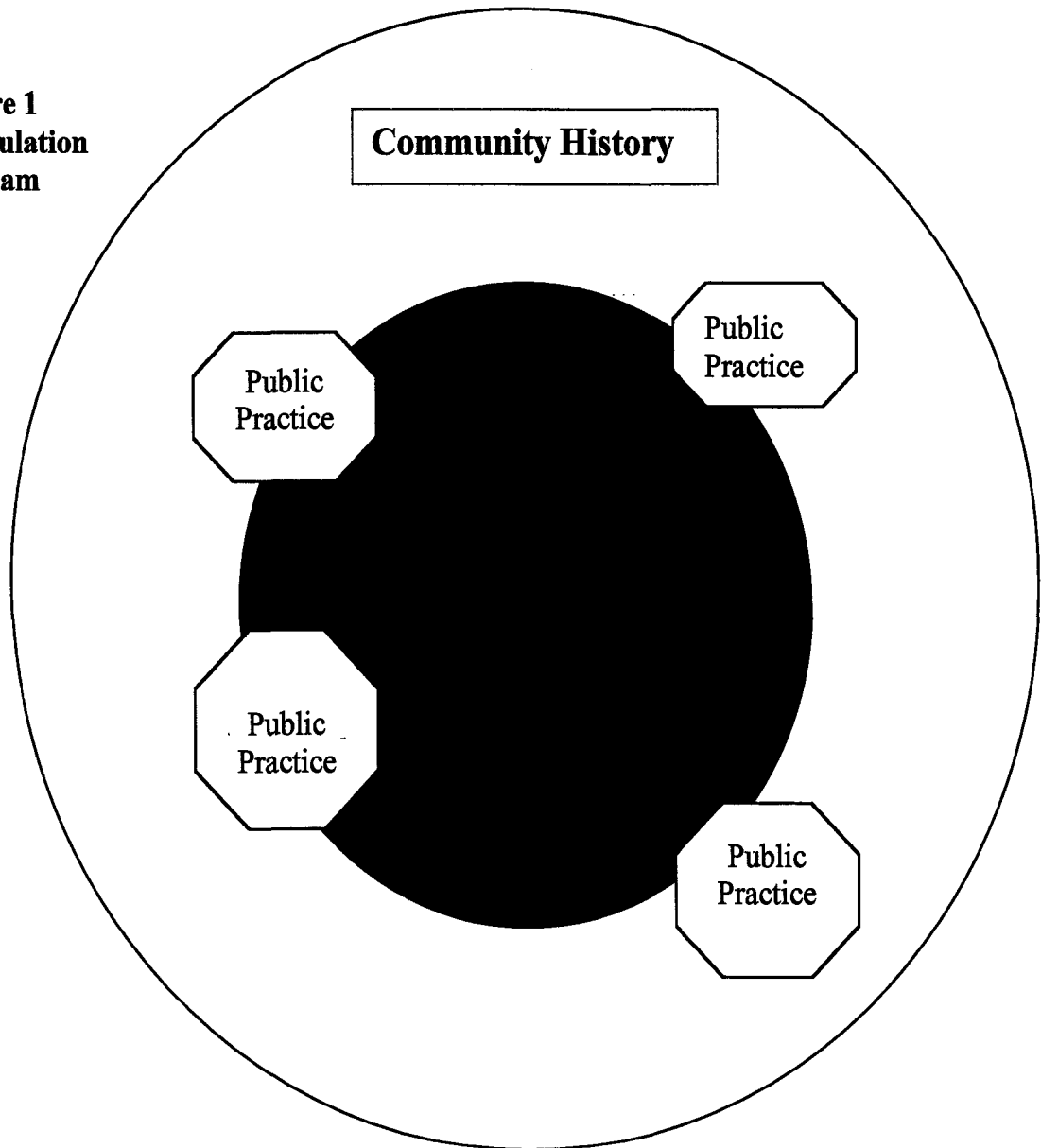
The primary question this dissertation posed was: *How are community identities created and articulated as part of a larger process of negotiating some sort of social change?* Drawing from evidence in the Wilkes-Barre case, the short answer to that question might be summarized with a diagram that attempts to simplify the complex process (See Figure 1).

### Visually representing a dynamic process

I'm not sure any visual representation can fully do justice to the concept of articulation, but for the sake of defining how it worked in Wilkes-Barre, Figure 1 on the next page serves as a jumping off place.

The outer circle represents community history. In the case of Wilkes-Barre, this history stretches to its early days of settlement. However, as I illustrated in chapter 2, some historical happenings stand out as significant for the majority of community members—the rise and fall of the coal industry and corresponding economic boom/bust and the Agnes flood of 1972 serve as two of the most important. That history, while certainly varied and layered, informs all happenings within the community. In other words, community members understand all social happenings—a new business setting up in the area, a grand social affair at an exclusive downtown club, the ousting of a long-time political leader, or a labor strike—through historical referents in order to assimilate them into social

**Figure 1**  
**Articulation**  
**diagram**



knowledge. The social affair at the exclusive club, for example, is necessarily linked to the club's questionable practice of only two decades ago when it did not accept Jews, blacks, or women as members. While community members may certainly refer to the party—attended by all of the above alongside white men—without hearkening to the club's previous racist/sexist/anti-Semitic practices, community members cannot contextualize the significance of the party without at least subconsciously recognizing that the club has changed its practices.

The inner circle of the diagram shaded in red depicts the significant social occurrence or happening, in this case the Wilkes-Barre newspaper strike of 1978. Clearly, the "happening" might have been anything. I could have chosen instead to look at the birth of a new university in Wilkes-Barre, for example, and examined the public practices that revolved around it. In the diagram, the size and positioning of the happening is perhaps a little misleading. It suggests that the Wilkes-Barre newspaper strike is central and an overwhelmingly significant focal point for Wilkes-Barre as a whole. While I do believe it to be an *important* historical happening, it is no more so than potentially many other social shifts we might have examined. It was not, for example, the only major strike that the area experienced. But because of the physical limitations of space on the page, I could not feasibly calculate and then illustrate a more true-to-scale visual representation of size as it reflected the happening within the larger community history. My point with the visual is simply to suggest that the happening is embedded within and informed by the larger, wider community history.

I should also note that the shapes in this diagram are purely representative of the theoretical concepts—they may be too neat, clean, and balanced to truly *reflect*, in any sort of real way, actual history. History of any kind is messy, spotty; its parameters are difficult to define. Indeed, historical boundaries are constantly shifting as referents like time, space, and significance are renegotiated. If this diagram were visually *accurate*, rather than merely representative, the circles might look more like uneven splatter marks (as if from a paint balloon exploded onto the side of a building).

I chose to highlight this happening in red—the conventional color of conflict. As I demonstrated in the many examples and details of the strike and what led up to

it, this social occurrence was from the very beginning fraught with tension and opposition. In their book *Persuasion and Social Movements*, Charles Stewart, Craig Smith, and Robert E. Denton, Jr. define a social movement as “an organized...and significantly large collectivity that emerges to bring about or to resist a program for change in societal norms and values, operates primarily through persuasive strategies, and encounters opposition in what becomes moral struggle” (17). In any social change of significance, resistance is common. In terms of the Wilkes-Barre newspaper strike, the struggle became so profound it led to violence, overtly persuasive appeals within the media, and a long-term social rift between the working class and those who sided with management. As a result, it certainly meets Stewart, Smith, and Denton’s criteria for a “social movement.”

Again, as I have already noted with the larger circle, this is also perhaps too neatly drawn to be truly representative. The social movement that was the strike actually may not have boundaries at all. While the strike itself is no longer, there was never any formal declaration of its official end. The unions were simply decertified, the *Citizens’ Voice* became its own master, and Wilkes-Barre residents found other areas of concern like government corruption, loss of business, and environmental concerns to place on the front burner. If anything, the boundaries of the happening in this case, should probably bleed in various directions and eventually fade into white.

Perhaps the most important part of the diagram—where the articulation of self actually occurs—lies in the individual public practices diagrammed as the unequal octagonal shapes that overlap across the circle representing the community history and the circle representing the social movement. These shapes are purposefully unequal in size and placement around the circles because each practice is unique. As the analysis in chapter three suggests, some practices have the potential to have more influence on community identity than others because of the way a practice may be timed, because of the source’s *ethos*, the ability to reach more community members, or because of a truth or untruth that piques an audience’s attention and requires further negotiation. Thus each practice in the diagram should be varied. Were the graphics program able to also produce texture on these practice visual representations, I would also make them varied and uneven. Some would

produce a fine grain like sandpaper, in that they leave residue that others may pick up. Others would be lumpy and sticky, prone to grabbing onto nearby practices like wet clay.

The practice symbols also link purposefully, but inconsistently in terms of how much, the history and current issue circles. In fact, those practices serve in some respects in the same way that bolts might bind two separate pieces of wood together. The blocks of wood are not necessarily *intended* to be connected, but when they are, using these bolts, the end result is fundamentally changed. The thing about bolts is that they can also be removed—they're designed to be removed, in fact. But the connective/linking ability of each practice will vary based again on frequency, range, and the other criteria I mentioned earlier. Some social movement practices draw more on community history than others. For example, in the practices initiated by the *Citizens' Voice* in its first issues, the consistent references to "heritage," "solidarity," and "sons and daughters of coal miners" count on audience members to know and view favorably the Valley's history of hard working coal miners who were often abused by corporate owners (coal barons).

Were this document on an interactive screen instead of paper, the arrows between the practices would blink on and off and connect erratically, across the middle, to neighboring practices, sometimes with three or four other practices simultaneously. The connections I try to depict here with the arrows are not guaranteed, nor are they permanent. The arrows indicate the momentary links across practices that often serve as the sites of negotiation. In fact, the lines of the arrows might also be textured, almost thorny, in that they should *feel* like the points of discovered *difference*. It is in that difference, those moments that community members sense and question dissonance, that identity is momentarily defined. Are we sons and daughters of coal miners? No? Well, then why not? We used to be. What's changed? If we are, what does it *mean* to be sons and daughters of coal miners now that the coal industry is basically dead? Is this who we want to be forever? The practices on both sides of the strike suggest that these questions, if not asked directly, were implied by the assumptions made in the images and words community members and stakeholders relied upon.

Stuart Hall argues it is in such links as these that new articulations of identity are formed. These links connect with other practices and call them into question to form new ideas. Such a process is evident in the practices that emerged from *Violence in the Valley*. The tabloid was a response to the practices initiated not only by the *Citizens' Voice* but also in public addresses and news reports from neighboring community/regional newspapers. The response, however, was silenced for several weeks after the strike began. At first, the corporation could not respond because the strike violence prevented the *Times Leader* from publishing and then later from distributing. After publishing resumed, the active efforts by the *Citizens' Voice* to silence Capital Cities also continued and remained fairly successful, as potential advertisers and readers remained swayed by the populist rhetoric of the striking workers. As I noted earlier, newsstands were reluctant to sell the paper, advertisers were intimidated into advertising only in the *Citizens' Voice*, and *Times Leader* newspaper machines were systematically vandalized.

The success of the silencing campaign was evident simply in community members' reluctance to subscribe to the *Times Leader*. While *Times Leader* writers made concerted efforts at response to the strikers in public messages, their impact was limited to a small local audience or to those who were not considered "true" community members. But *Violence in the Valley* aimed to re-tell the story of the strike, and Capital Cities executives spent an enormous amount of money to ensure that the message was distributed, this time through the postal system. The link this publication made initially was that it acknowledged it was "another view" of the strike.

This alternate perception immediately confirmed that there were preceding public practices, and that they required response—*dialogue*. By addressing claims made in the *Citizens' Voice*, the messages in *Violence in the Valley* purposefully linked with community members' knowledge. It did not, however, assume that community members accepted the knowledge gained from previous practices as gospel truth. No, in fact the *Times Leader* messages counted on readers questioning the validity of claims made in the prior practices. Hence, the difference between practices. While the messages acknowledge one another, or address issues raised previously, they also presume the need for alternate realities, other truths. In effect,

public practices such as the letters to the editor that criticize strike violence challenged community members to re-see the “truth” of the strike itself. References to previous claims made by *Citizens’ Voice* writers show connection to interpretations offered by CV writers, but they implicitly raise the important question: *Is this who we want to be?* It is in this dialogue that Wilkes-Barre community members face the challenge of re-negotiating identity.

### **Applying articulation and valuing the particular**

The newspaper strike of 1978 reflects a complex communicative event from which we can learn a great deal about community members’ perceptions of Wilkes-Barre and its residents. I have previously emphasized that this insight is one that helps us to better understand the *particular* circumstance. What may be interpreted about how Wilkes-Barre residents saw themselves during and after the strike will not necessarily apply to Detroit, Michigan during various automotive workers’ labor strikes, or even New York City, which experienced a newspaper strike at almost the same time Wilkes-Barre did.

As indicated by the varied links that occurred across social practices, Wilkes-Barre community members relied on shared experience, area-specific history, norms and values—all as they informed the immediate happenings associated with the strike—in order to negotiate how they saw themselves. Certainly, as Hall points out, those links are never fixed, nor are the individual practices necessarily intended to connect with one another. Their connection, however, leads to new articulations of identity. Some of these articulations endure longer than others. Some dominate the public dialogue for a time, and call into question other links and practices. Not only could those links never be duplicated in Detroit or New York, but they could also not be duplicated now in Wilkes-Barre even if another newspaper strike were to occur. With few exceptions, the participants would be different. The area has changed physically, and the threat of the same sort of damage from a flood like the one that occurred in 1972 has diminished. The once thriving downtown is now struggling to regain the patronage it has lost steadily since the early 1980s to the shopping malls on the edge of town. The economic and social ties to labor have dissipated. Various national and international happenings in the past 24 years have



affected how Wilkes-Barre residents see themselves and their world. No, duplication is not the goal with this study. It is not possible.

But my privileging of the particular in this study does not preclude a wider application of the process for accessing and understanding the rhetorical strategies involved in identity negotiation. A careful examination of some of the links that occur in this particular set of circumstances illustrates how new ideas emerge and take hold in a social setting. They show, in fact, how meaning is made (temporarily) amidst interpretation of social change, in this case, unrest—*difference*.

A direct application of articulation in this instance is important. While cultural studies scholars such as Hall, Lawrence Grossberg, Jennifer Daryl Slack, and others have tried to define how articulation works *in theory*, none I have read have actually applied articulation to real community dialogue or negotiation process. It is useful to see the links at work in this setting to understand how the negotiation process emerged for the people of Wilkes-Barre. Through such attention to particular historical happenings we can better understand the rhetorical strategies that negotiate shared meaning. While the Wilkes-Barre case cannot be duplicated for the purposes of further inquiry, its validity as an example of a particularized set of circumstances in which identity negotiation occurs is clear. To better understand how we can use articulation and how meaning is made, the discipline can benefit from studies like this one that apply such theories.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge is in understanding how the practices assume power and influence perception. It's not as though my diagram actually allows the powerful practices to somehow turn color when they are actively influencing others, or little orange lights flash on and off when the connection is made. But the fact of the matter is that even if I could get an animator to help me with that, even if the page would allow such magic, I could not necessarily *show* which practices assume such power or when with any sort of precision.

Interpreting power across practices relies on just that—some decent guesswork that is inherently limited only to what the researcher can uncover or perceive. While I have observed or located numerous public practices that tell interesting stories and indicate strong, perceptible links, there are many practices that occurred I could not witness, that were perhaps done behind closed doors, that

have been forgotten, or that simply weren't offered in the same sorts of high profile public ways as the ones I offer here. But just because they weren't archived in the same way that many of the practices I used here were, doesn't mean they didn't have significant impact on the community identity negotiation process. Thus, without a complete picture of the experience, which is nearly impossible, the "guesswork" is unavoidably limited as any researcher tries to pinpoint how specific practices may have impacted the social milieu.

However, given that the challenge still remains to better understand the issue of power as it pertains to the articulation process, there are certain steps we can take to chip away at the mystery.

### **What Wins the Game—Great Defense or Aggressive Offense?**

Any real baseball fan has at one time or another fantasized about being able to put together the "perfect team," the one that could win it all because the players are masters at their respective positions. Obviously, in a fantasy league where you could choose the best players for every position, an owner could ideally end up with a roster that included everyone from Ted Williams, Lou Gehrig, and Willie Mays to more recent greats like Hank Aaron, Nolan Ryan, and Derek Jeter. Naturally, the best managers know winning is never dependent on one thing. In baseball, the team that prevails in October is usually the team with the best balance and the best luck, usually in that order.

But...this is a fantasy league, so anything is possible. What if you were limited? What if your choice came down to whether you were going to have to rely exclusively on great defensive ability or powerful offense? What if you had to choose between brilliant pitching from someone like Roger Clemens or Curt Schilling (reasoning that if your defense is great and the opposing team cannot hit you, you should be able to win the game), or you had to rely on powerful hitting from well-known sluggers like Alex Rodriguez, Sammy Sosa, or Barry Bonds (reasoning that if you score the most runs your team will win)? There are no guarantees with either approach. Great pitchers have off days. Great hitters can go cold at the plate. But unless you're Commissioner Bud Selig and it's the 2002 All-

Star game—all tied up in the 11<sup>th</sup> with no more pitchers for either team—*there are no ties in baseball*. Eventually, great offense or great defense will prevail.

Determining on any given day how defense prevails over offense or vice versa is dependent on thousands of variables. (e.g., How is the sun positioned? Does it interfere with visibility?) The most extraordinary talents and percentages can never fully ensure outcome. It is the confluence of circumstance that makes baseball such a subtle, complex and unpredictable game.

The same holds true for analyzing and anticipating how public practices may dominate a social setting, particularly one such as the Wilkes-Barre newspaper strike that reflected so much unrest and change in the community. While we can look for consistent references across practices, even repetition doesn't guarantee dominance or control over the community's perception of itself. In fact, as Hall and others would argue, those terms or ideas upon which people may agree matter much less than those that are disputed. It is in difference, as I suggested in chapter one, that identity is negotiated.

### **Practices as response to conflict**

I used the analogy of defense versus offense intentionally, because I think there is something of value in its application to how specific practices may command more public attention than others at a given moment. It is reasonable to assume that all public practices are initiated in response to some type of stimulus. For example, in the Wilkes-Barre newspaper strike, union workers responded to what they saw as unethical, unacceptable demands from the new ownership by declaring a strike and starting their own newspaper. Therefore it follows that the workers' public practices in this case would not have occurred had they not felt compelled to *respond* in some way to practices initiated by Capital Cities executives. Because we cannot go back to the first public practice—this would take us back to Stone Age drawings in caves, undoubtedly—we must read all practice as related to and in response to something that precedes it. Like defense, public practice is inherently *responsive*.

However, many public practices also stitch a *new* concept or idea into the fabric of the wider social collage. This initiative is akin to offense—moving forward

either with a base hit or a run scored. The introduction of new information or new definitions builds on existing knowledge and forces community members to alter their perceptions of self and their expectations for eventual outcomes. Drawing again from the example of the workers' response to the Capital Cities/Union contract talk breakdown, the *introduction* of the *Citizens' Voice* newspaper changed the fabric of public communication in the city. It not only served as a defensive reaction to perceived injustices, but also as an offensive push for an alternative (and new) communication outlet.

Sub-categories to initiation and response—which are never mutually exclusive, just as there cannot be defense without offense—include reflection, amplification, and silence. These communication strategies inform our understanding of how practices may assume or abdicate power. Practices may simply *reflect* knowledge of history and echo previous statements by others. This mirroring is common to interpersonal communication theory and is primarily used to clarify interpretation of the original (or preceding) message. Effectively, the implied message is, “Here is what I believe you just said.” By interpreting the preceding or primary message, the community members do not *advance* the exchange much, but instead offer a frame of reference for or strengthen existing messages. For example, the first condemnation of the violence that emerged through the strike, the subsequent angry letters to the editor published in the *Times Leader* more or less reflected what had already been communicated.

However, with more affirmation (amplification), the message may gain power without adding new information. For instance, the consistent references in the *Citizens' Voice* to the values of close familial ties and solidarity are not *new* ideas *per se*. But these values are echoed and augmented through their application to the strike itself. Striking workers sought to claim those ideals as their own by using the concepts in public messages in ways that suggested the *Citizens' Voice* and the union workers embodied solidarity and family values.

The impact of silence—or no response—is a difficult thing to measure. If the *Times Leader* had not eventually responded to the *Citizens' Voice's* claims about the realities of the strike, would the public have perceived the strike differently? If so, how? Silence might have been interpreted as arrogance and caused more emotional

distance between community members and Capital Cities. On the other hand, writers at the *Times Leader* might have communicated a simple message of dignity had they not responded. "We will not dignify such claims with a response, as they are clearly ridiculous." I'm not sure this interpretation would have helped Capital Cities any more than the first, though.

Silence also does not necessarily equal neutrality; sometimes silence signals calculation, planning. It can be a rhetorical move and can impact community perceptions. As I illustrated earlier, Tom Bigler's silence at WBRE Channel 28 was intentional and had significant impact. Bigler was widely acknowledged as a strong community leader and a force in shaping community values. His daily editorials on the television news often served to inspire widespread public discussion. His silence on the strike was conspicuous and likely also influenced other public leaders to avoid outright condemnation of the strike violence or allegiance with the corporation.

### **What gains power in the larger conversation?**

So, is trying to determine how a practice gains a foothold within the public consciousness a little like trying to determine whether an all-star defensive team will beat an all-star offensive team? Yes and no. Understanding how a practice gains power to define community identity is about several things coming together at once: timing, how a message reaches an audience, the *ethos* of the speaker/writer, insight into or shared history, the frequency with which the message is delivered, and whether there is continued difference and re-negotiation amongst recipients. As baseball's Joe Garagiola once said, "It takes pitching, hitting and defense. Any two can win. All three make you unbeatable

(<http://www.angelfire.com/pop/basballcs/baseballquotes.html>).

Most newspaper editors know that it simply takes finding a new "spin" on a story to keep it fresh and in the news. How many versions of the September 11 attacks did audiences see and read? New voices, new details, re-takes on history we share, timing—they all allow the media to continue to call the story "news." While that story remains at the forefront of the American agenda, there will be continued

negotiation, an effort to rearticulate what occurred and its meaning to us as a nation, indeed, as a world.

Wilkes-Barre's newspaper strike stories—and that plural is intentional; there were obviously many different stories—informed community identity negotiation for years in the city. This was at least partly because it was in the best interests of the union workers and Capital Cities to keep it at the fore. While community members wrestled with the implications of the strike on many levels, both the union workers and Capital Cities stood to gain (and lose) based on where Wilkes-Barre residents placed their collective faith. If the union lost its battle, or was perceived by the public to have given in, it meant not only the loss of control at the *Times Leader*, but also it would be a significant blow to overall faith in the union representation in other areas of industry. (In 1978 there remained numerous businesses with strong contingents of union representation, and widespread credibility was at stake in this case.) Also, the failure of the unions could signal a challenge to the dominant narrative of “the working class hero” that most residents now claim was a long-held romantic understanding of Wilkes-Barre's character. As one resident told me, Bruce Springsteen never wrote a song about Wilkes-Barre, but he sure would have been comfortable there.

On the other hand, if the unions had eventually cowed the corporation, it might have spelled disaster for continued economic growth in the area. Wilkes-Barre ran a great risk of being perceived by outside developers as potentially volatile and not business-friendly. Several practices indicated that Capital Cities executives wondered about the union control of the area before they purchased the newspaper, and clearly this concern had good cause. Had such an economic development downturn occurred, thanks in part to Capital Cities' failure, community members would have eventually been critical of local leadership, and perhaps even the unions (interestingly, this has actually evolved in the past five to seven years in the city).

In 1978 an official from the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania made a similar prediction about the potential impact on the community if Capital Cities failed in its efforts to successfully and peacefully negotiate new contracts with union representatives.

'People think there are more labor disputes here [in the Wyoming Valley], but that's not true,' he said.

The assets of the area are overshadowed by the strike, he added. Those assets include quick access to an interstate transportation system, proximity to major markets, availability of prepared industrial lands and an abundance of water.

The official also said that any strike would hurt the area.

'Anything that hinders business sets the region back month by month.'  
 ("Any strike will hurt the Valley")

In effect, one of the things this study illustrates is just how much power the print media has to control the perception of self among community members. What we deem important is often dependent, at least in some measure, upon what the *media* choose to place on the front burner. We can't value what we don't know about. We won't privilege what doesn't command our attention. The news media's rhetorical practices consciously reflect values and positions, and most importantly define for community members what is *new*.

Now, it's also important to acknowledge that not everyone in Wilkes-Barre regularly read the newspaper in 1978. The power of either paper to influence community members was limited, obviously, to those who either read the news or to those who gathered news second hand from sources who did. But even if one member of all 50,000 households to which the first run of the *Citizens' Voice* was delivered merely glanced at the headlines or looked at the photographs, we can be assured significant influence occurred. But there were many community members who relied on other social outlets to both receive and send public messages. As I have demonstrated, some significant practices occurred in churches and synagogues—where the message was delivered in a public forum and later discussed among community members who were not there. Some occurred at meetings that were closed to the public, but that involved many community members. Some occurred at large public rallies, or in volatile confrontations on the picket line itself. While some of these public practices were witnessed by many community members, and undoubtedly exchanged like tall tales over beers at the local pubs afterward, none had the potential for as much impact as those messages reported in the papers or on television. The latter simply reached a larger audience, and did so daily.

Acknowledging what sorts of practices occur is certainly an important step in understanding how or if they encourage attention and negotiation among community members. Whether initiation or response, amplification or silence, how those practices link with others is the first step. Determining the outcome of that temporary link is actually key to any insight into community identity.

But the circumstance that creates the friction necessary to encourage reflection is *diaspora*, and from the public practices that respond to this circumstance identity is constituted.

### **Revisiting Diaspora and Recognizing Relational Networks**

As I stated in chapter 1, Stuart Hall argues that identity of any kind should be seen as *production*, never finished, always shifting. *Diaspora*, a forced displacement of citizens, is not only fertile ground for such production, but also offers specific context for carefully examining the process. While diaspora is a term almost exclusively associated with whole races of people, the principal issues associated with it are applicable on smaller scales like the Wilkes-Barre newspaper strike. At its core, the concept of diaspora means a forced displacement or reluctant scattering of citizens. While the displacement in this case did not entail actually *leaving* the community of Wilkes-Barre, the circumstances of having to leave their workplace, and some their homes as a result of lost wages, forced community members to seek new social connections within painful and frightening circumstances and to work hard to maintain those ties that previously existed. In addition, the concept of grief, which is inherent in *diaspora* was certainly evident in the rhetoric that emerged throughout the strike on both sides.

#### **Worker displacement in Wilkes-Barre**

In this case, as I have shown, workers were physically displaced from their offices—some would claim they were forced from them by the Capital Cities management. Granted, the initial movement was only across the alley; but the catalyst for the move was social pressure. Workers felt widespread disconnection from management and oppression from what they perceived to be new social values



introduced to the workplace by the corporate owners. Diaspora also assumes a certain threat of violence that is perhaps less evident in this case. While violence was evident during the strike, the threat of violence *before* the strike was just that, a threat. Workers, however, would argue that threat of violence in this instance should not be limited to bodily harm. When economic livelihood, perception of character, and ethical practice are threatened, violence is a reality.

In addition, many would say that workers left voluntarily—they chose to strike. In most interpretations of diaspora, citizens are forced to leave. But it is this concept of force I want to call into question here. Being *forced* is often a matter of interpretation. While Capital Cities executives, for example, would argue that workers left the job voluntarily, most workers would counter that they were *forced* from their positions because of the unethical treatment from new ownership. Indeed, many workers claimed they felt they had no choice whatsoever. The “push factors” (circumstances that force community members into specific response) common to much more substantial cases of diaspora such as threat of genocide, enslavement, or work camps obviously were not at issue in Wilkes-Barre in this case. However, the fact that Capital Cities management had no intention of setting up some sort of nightmare detention center is perhaps less important than what workers and Wilkes-Barre residents *thought* when they saw the barbed wire fence, cameras and armed guards come to “secure” the grounds. While workers likely didn’t fear for their lives, they certainly felt politically oppressed. The union was their political vehicle, their means of negotiating their livelihoods. If the unions were squashed, the people believed they would have no voice, no human dignity. This threat is significant enough to be considered a “push” factor in workers’ displacement from the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Company. It was in this displacement that the impetus for remembrance and commemoration among workers emerged—what Kathryn notes is the result of diaspora.

Community members, particularly those sympathetic to the workers’ plight, actively drew on connections of shared history and identification with “roots” in their public practices as a means of reconstituting who they were as Wilkes-Barre residents. I use the term “reconstituting” instead of affirming, because the process was not about simple reflection of previously held values or perceptions of self.

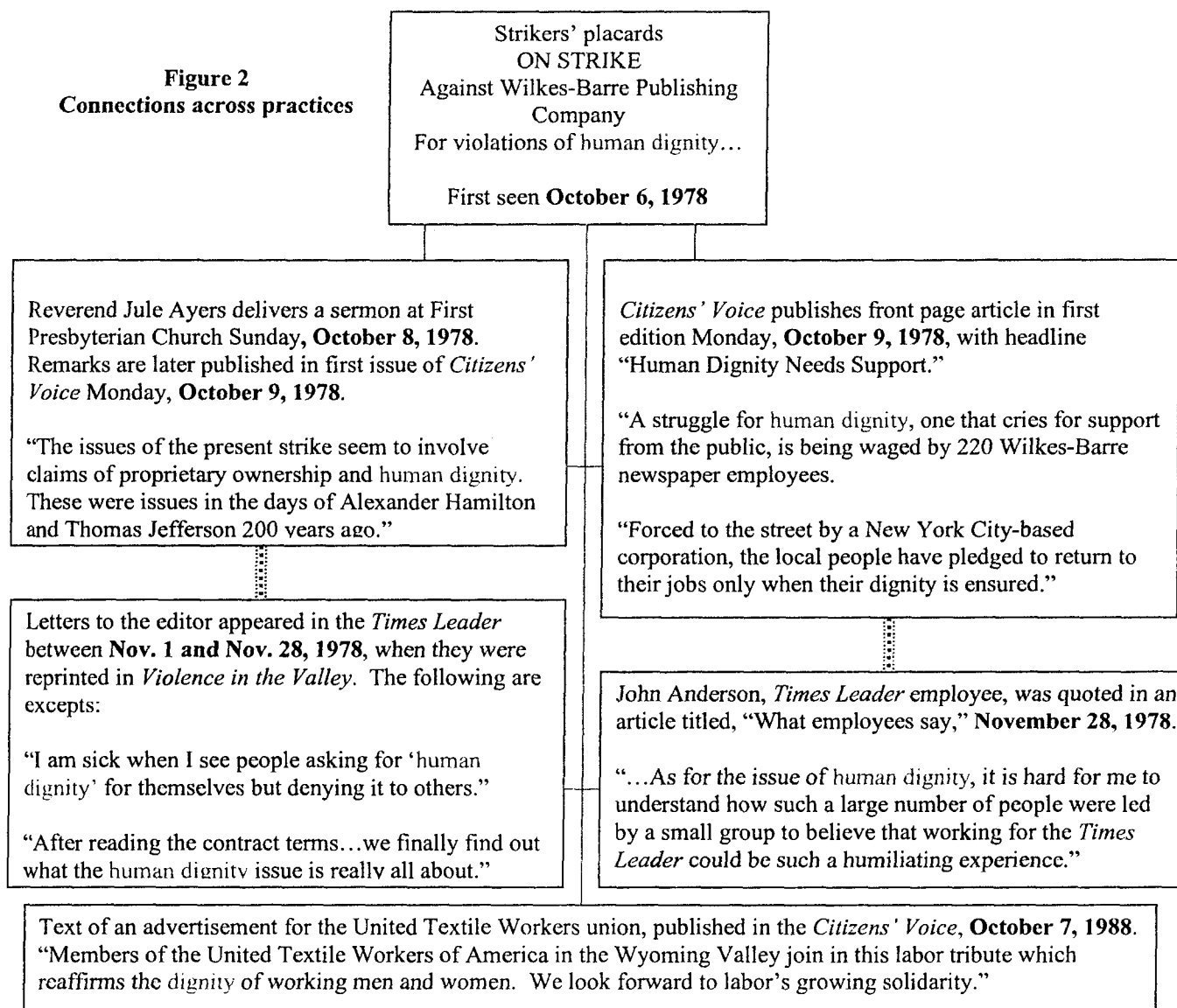
Instead, community members drew on history, location, and a sense of ethics and actively *connected* those reflections with observations about the existing context. In the wake of so much unrest and change within the community, Wilkes-Barre residents experienced a heightened sense of urgency in these public practices. The circumstances surrounding the strike encouraged among community members, and especially the displaced workers, a sense of impending dread of abandonment—not just physical loss of space, but social separation as well. As a result, many of the practices discussed in Chapter 3 reflect an interpretation and application of history to immediate circumstances. It is through these interpretations and active connections that negotiation of identity occurs.

### **Relational networks**

I want to focus here on what Woodward calls the *relational network* that emerges from the social dynamics inherent in diaspora. The relational network is the means by which humans connect in an effort to remember what they have left behind and incorporate those origins into the new existence they forge. On a smaller scale where the Wilkes-Barre newspaper strike is concerned, the relational network appears across practices as a means of underscoring the importance of a specific value, emotion, or characteristic. I think that in locating these relational networks, the places at which concepts link, we are able to see the sites of negotiation and the moments at which identity emerges.

Human dignity was a recurring theme in many of the practices, and particularly in the outcry against Capital Cities' management when the unions declared the strike. I have highlighted several of those practices in a diagram and placed them in the chronological order in which they were made public. These examples are not exhaustive of all the practices that occurred and relied on the concept of "human dignity," but they do illustrate clear links and lines of negotiation that are useful for our examination. **See Figure 2 on opposite page.**

**Figure 2**  
**Connections across practices**



While the strikers' placards for the picket line were perhaps the first public practices that employed the "human dignity" issue, the messages were not widely available to the public unless community members drove by the picket line and witnessed them. There was television coverage of the strike on its first day, certainly, so it is possible television viewers could read the signs the picketers carried. But for the most part, the placards/picket signs carried less influence than subsequent messages. Nevertheless, the issue of "human dignity" had been raised at this point. Once the concept had been articulated in a single public practice, questioning the nature of "human dignity" became part of the larger public negotiation of the Wilkes-Barre identity.

In Reverend Ayers' sermon and in the subsequent *Citizens' Voice* articles, "human dignity" was better defined as an ideal. While Ayers relates the issue to one with which American forefathers struggled, the article in the *Citizen's Voice* uses the issue as a battle cry. Both define human dignity as a *cause* and site of struggle, and declare it worthy of public attention. Clearly, these two practices—Ayers' sermon and the *Citizens' Voice* article—connect in terms of timing and ability to reach a wide audience. It is noteworthy that they appear side by side in the layout of the front page of the first issue of the *Citizens' Voice*. Such a visual arrangement indicates an equality in terms of importance, and the support both messages lend to the value of "human dignity" suggests connection with one another in terms of purpose.

While it takes nearly a month for the response messages to reach a similar audience, the subsequent practices demonstrated in the *Times Leader* through letters to the editor and comments by employees about the strike not only acknowledge the issue of "human dignity," but challenge readers' definitions of it. In both John Anderson's quote and the letters to the editor, all of which are separate practices, Wilkes-Barre residents' understanding of "human dignity" as belonging exclusively to the strikers in their cause is called into question. These practices are connected in the same way the Ayers and *Citizens' Voice* quotes are; they appear in the same publication at the same time and highlight the issue of "human dignity." However, the relationship the Anderson quote and the letters to the editor in the *Times Leader* have to the corresponding *Citizens' Voice* practices is more important to the

negotiation process. In other words, the vertical connections in the diagram highlighted with red connecting lines are more actively negotiating difference than the horizontal connections, which largely agree with one another. The vertical connections in the diagram indicate evidence of friction, places where the understanding of “human dignity” clearly differs across practices. Though the writers are not necessarily literally in *conversation* with one another, in essence, the public exchange in the newspapers has that effect. Those who followed the dispute and its effects on the city understood the importance and cost of defining just what “human dignity” was and how it pertained to the city of Wilkes-Barre. Thus, the tension between conflicting definitions indicates a struggle to control the prevailing public attitude about the strike and the city’s sense of self.

A full decade after the onset of the strike, a local union chose to employ the concept of human dignity in an ad that supported labor (the text of the ad is highlighted at the bottom of the diagram ). Interestingly, the source of the message did not change significantly from the source at the beginning of the relational network in the striking workers’ message. While the individuals are undoubtedly different, labor union affiliates saw themselves as connected to one another (this was especially evident when they referred to themselves as “brothers and sisters” in many of the practices). The strong support for the union cause, therefore, is certainly similar. But after ten years, the tone of the message about human dignity has softened somewhat. No longer does it sound like a battle cry, but the ad’s sponsor gently “affirms” the importance of human dignity. Again, while the concept is not drastically changed, the new tone suggests some re-negotiation and difference across practices.

This is just one relational network across practices that indicates how we might see the community identity negotiation in process. The red lines indicate some sort of tension or dispute. It is in these locations that we begin to see what characteristics community members value and seek to rearticulate.

Clearly, the network is just a small fraction of reality in this instance. Through further exploration—closer inspection of other responses not illustrated here—these moments of dissonance would help us continue to pinpoint what issues were important to community members, or at least worthy of dispute. We would

also see more examples of what people in the Valley felt was threatened. How were perceptions of Wilkes-Barre challenged in these circumstances? How did these challenges affect how community members saw themselves? With this thumbnail sketch of one set of related practices, we can see that human dignity was of importance to residents.

### **Purposive movement**

Finally, the practices associated with the strike in Wilkes-Barre illustrate *purposive movement*. The movement is precipitated by economic and social changes and reflects a struggle between forces who want to maintain the status quo (based on many of the narratives I have already highlighted in Chapters 2 and 3, the striking workers and their supporters sought to *maintain* traditional approaches and values) and those who see the need to alter behavior to meet changing demands of the outside world (those who supported the efforts of Cap Cities and workers at the *Times Leader* to increase journalistic quality and economic viability).

The practices related to the strike are clearly purposive; they reflect an effort by community members to consciously re-see who they are in light of the circumstances they face. These practices do not always overtly recognize and/or respond directly to one another as if in dialogue. Nevertheless, the connections across practices are certainly evident in the articulation and rearticulation of key ideas, as I have illustrated in my diagram of the connections in practices referring to “human dignity.”

It is through repetition of terms and interpretation/re-interpretation of events that we can detect conscious connection across practices. Those who initiate a message do not aim to acknowledge an opposing speaker directly in most cases, but rather to indicate which conversation they are entering. Clearly, in 1978 (and beyond) there were many concurrent conversations that appeared in print and public speeches. Each related practice addressed some element of the strike and its effect on Wilkes-Barre’s identity; however, most honed in on specific issues related to the cause(s) of the strike, its duration and the way the violence was managed, the issues that precipitated the fight, and eventually, the strike’s aftermath. Few if any tried to tackle every facet of the strike and its impact on the community. However,

each speaker/writer intentionally placed a specific practice within the larger conversation by identifying key themes. In addition, timing had much to do with this purposive movement. Whether they acknowledged a preceding comment overtly or not, *when* a comment was voiced (in print or otherwise) created the effect of public dialogue.

For example, references across practices about the fence and its implications for the city consistently 1) *named the offense* (the barbed wire and purpose behind the fence), 2) *referenced other previous public interpretations* (this can be seen clearly in references, both overt and implied, to Nazi Germany after the *Wyoming Valley Observer* likened the atmosphere to “Stalag 17” in an August 20, 1978 article), and 3) *offered a new interpretation or application* of the issue (e.g., after the August 20 reference in the *Wyoming Valley Observer* to Stalag 17, the Council of Newspaper Unions released a statement on October 9 that encouraged *action* in connection with the interpretation of the fence: “Would anyone in Wyoming Valley or Northeastern Pennsylvania allow themselves to be subjected to a Stalag environment without protest?”) In this case the connection to the initial reference of “Stalag 17” is clear because of the language, but the timing is also of relevance here. The Council of Newspaper Unions (as well as the striking workers and their supporters) moves the conversation purposefully across time and with specific terms to add another layer to readers’ understanding of the fence’s impact. The six weeks between references to the Stalag 17 atmosphere ensures that the image does not fade among readers and therefore lose its power to persuade.

### **Articulation and building relational networks: valuing process over product**

If we were to juxtapose the “human dignity” relational network in the diagram against other sets of practices that identified the issues of *solidarity*, *tradition*, *economic development*, or *work ethic*, similar connections and evidence of friction/dissonance undoubtedly would become evident. In a close examination of such relational networks, the goal would be to examine the links particularly as they overlap with one another. It is in those moments we gain insight into social negotiation over the definition of community identity.

In such side-by-side examination of relational networks, the tendency may be to attempt to compare frequency and the *ethos* of the speakers and perhaps draw some conclusions about whether certain issues were of more value than others. But I'm not sure the field stands to gain much in trying to ascertain which practices held more power or impacted the social situation more. To do so forces us to seek an *answer*, some sort of literal truth, which I'm not convinced exists. As Michael Mayerfeld Bell notes in his final chapter on methods in *Childerley*, narrative distortion is inevitable because "real life is too ongoing, complex and ambiguous for the neatness a convincing scholarly argument requires" (243). The use of articulation as one means of understanding how knowledge and perception is constructed in specific settings is absolutely about engaging in the *process* of searching for links. To seek a definitive *answer* with respect to power and dominance diminishes the importance of examining the connections and the *process* of meaning-making in this case.

### **How do Articulation and Community Identity Advance the Field of Rhetoric and Professional Communication?**

If identity and its articulation are fundamentally about knowledge creation within discourse, further study in this area is of value for teachers, practitioners, and theorists in rhetoric. Not only does the study of articulation and community identity challenge researchers in the field to ask tough questions about how to examine particularized knowledges, but further inquiry also has the potential to create an important cross-disciplinary bridge drawing from rhetoric, cultural studies, sociology and a host of other areas, depending on the study a researcher may initiate. Such a cross-disciplinary research agenda is particularly useful for the field of rhetoric as new scholars are being trained to understand communication as the jumping off place for inquiry into all human social conditions.

Further **research into community identity** also promises to help theorists better understand how people position themselves socially and how specific rhetorical practices guide that social positioning. It is in this examination of *production* that we move away from what have almost exclusively been theoretical



uses for articulation, and begin to examine how articulation actually works in the social world. As I noted earlier, this is an important move for those interested in rhetorical applications for articulation. The use for articulation in cultural studies has been exclusively theoretical. As articulation becomes more and more important to rhetoric and professional communication, we must begin to see it as a *means* by which we can particularize our sense of meaning making as a process. Through close examination of overlapping practices and how they link (albeit temporarily) in specific circumstances, we can begin to see knowledge formation.

As such, the possibilities for application are nearly endless. While I have focused on community identity formation, researchers in the field might apply such close examination of links across practices to classroom settings, to organizational/business settings, or to other observable social movements. Communities, as I argued in Chapter 1, can and have been defined in a variety of ways. I chose a city in the midst of social, political, and economic upheaval because as people who *live* within communities, the insight we gain from such a study has the potential to help us better understand how public practices may influence that change. Of course, the identity articulation examined here is unique to Wilkes-Barre and its particular set of circumstances. But examining links across practices is something that may be applied to other settings. It is only through this sort of close examination that we come close to accessing *some* truths about meaning making. By applying what has heretofore been almost exclusively theorized, this study opens up the possibility of a wide range of applications to the classroom and other areas of research.

Even in particular situations such as the Wilkes-Barre case, there are hundreds of unanswered questions. I suspect I could write volumes on the historical connections and practices that emerged from the strike without even locating the richest vein. Much of this sort of research is highly dependent upon the researcher's insights, which is at least partly why this area is potentially so rich for future inquiry. There are many things I could not address in this study, perhaps because I didn't *see* them. While I would argue that my perspective as outsider-looking-in afforded me a unique vantage point from which to examine the practices associated with the strike, it serves as only *one* interpretation. I was not a resident of

Wilkes-Barre in 1978. I am not native to the area. There were moments in this study when I worried I might not be emotionally or socially *positioned* to adequately interpret the practices I examined. The concept of *positioning* argued best by anthropologist Renato Rosaldo in his introduction to *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, challenges the researcher to recognize that interpretation has everything to do with what he or she is *prepared* to imagine based on their own personal experiences. Could I have grasped the meanings behind these temporary connections better had I been here and seen the effects of the strike firsthand? I think the answer to that question is that I would have grasped it *differently*, not necessarily better. Part of what makes qualitative research so messy, and also so inherently interesting, is that it is dependent upon the researcher's re-imagining of experience. As such, if researchers are careful and reflexive, they also stand to learn a lot about the researcher's role and impact on a given field. The benefit to this close examination, though, is that it forces the researcher to constantly evaluate the role he or she plays, and such reflexivity is healthy for the field overall.

For the sake of manageability for this study I did not identify specifically *how* relational networks overlap with one another. It is possible, as I suggested earlier, that such close examination of rich narrative detail might bear out a variety of other issues connected with identity that we do not see here.

Another study might also have looked at differences between references to the individual self and the collective sense of self and how those may or may not be articulated separately. What these questions and others suggest is that as community members and researchers, we stand to gain from more careful scrutiny into how we identify ourselves collectively and what the process of negotiation entails in specific settings.

We may also think of our **classrooms as micro communities**. One of the things I work to establish in most of my writing classes is a sense of *community*, but I find this is a loaded term in some respects. What do I mean by *writing community* and what specific practices will help my students to not only actively engage in the struggle to forge an awareness of self, but to understand it *as* a part of a larger collective. And what benefits do my students get from such a perspective? Most writing classes—or any academic class, for that matter— will not be faced with

negotiation through diaspora. While my use of the term scales back the severity of potential circumstances in which the concept may be applied, such alienation and threat should never be a part of any classroom community. But negotiation and struggle is certainly part of any rhetorical situation, and especially one in which a group works to forge a sense of self.

Clearly, most modern textbooks in rhetoric, business and technical communication, and even journalism emphasize the importance of understanding the rhetorical situation in any message decision-making process. What articulation offers to writing classrooms is a means by which we may seek specific links across practices in order to more closely scrutinize key influences on meaning. It also underscores the notion that meaning is dynamic; therefore, the responsibility of community member is to constantly re-evaluate the particular circumstances of the situation. I can see assignments that ask students to examine links across practices as a means of understanding where negotiation occurs.

Now, I admit that such detailed scrutiny is somewhat impractical for most undergraduate students and professionals. Frankly, most journalists or technical writers operate under severe time and space constraints and cannot bother to scrutinize so closely. Their goal is to generally understand the field well enough to construct meaningful additions to the larger conversation, whatever that may be. However, articulation may also be used simply to identify recurring themes and help professionals and those in training to contribute intelligently. The goal here is for students and practitioners alike to better understand that each public practice is connected and socially/historically situated within a larger context.

In terms of **rhetorical practice**, the Wilkes-Barre case is useful in illustrating the incredibly complex, dynamic nature of any social situation. The goal for any social research and subsequent application is to offer as true a snapshot of the scene as possible. This means that the practitioner cannot be satisfied with obvious polarities and one-dimensional assessments of any field. What an application of articulation makes clear is that such cursory examinations of communication practices are no longer possible. Not only are global and local histories important to understanding the context in which ideas are formed, but timing, relationships to other practices, *ethos* of the speaker/writer, and conflict all figure in to how we

formulate meaning. Articulation, particularly as it is applied to community identity, pushes us to value the many layers—the *bricolage*—of what constitutes our realities in a particular moment.

One of the things that might be surmised from my case study is that Wilkes-Barre understood itself only in the most extreme polarities—good and bad, black and white, labor and management. In fact, these were the ideas that emerged from the practices about the strike itself—or the impetus for it—but they do not reflect how community members saw Wilkes-Barre. In fact, the values community members worked to articulate were much more complex and dynamic. Most will tell you, even today, that if folks were around and old enough to understand the strike, they formed an opinion on either side of the picket line. Community members either supported the union workers or supported big business. It really was as clear as that.

What was not nearly so clear was what allegiance to one side of the argument meant for understanding who the community of Wilkes-Barre was. While most residents would agree that the characteristics of human dignity, family loyalty, truth, good faith, and solidarity were important to understanding who they were as a collective, the challenge becomes in understanding what those concepts meant to people, and how they actively sought to define them in public ways. The efforts to set parameters for these concepts served as the sites of struggle at which identity was negotiated. What does it mean to bargain in good faith? “It means compromise.” “No, it means respecting the workers’ rights.” Could the two sides ever fully agree on what that means? Probably not, but resolution—at least where identity is concerned—isn’t the goal. Knowing that “good faith” is valuable enough to argue is perhaps as close as we come to fully understanding its place in identity and how community members see themselves. If there isn’t difference, it is less important.

Technically, no one could be declared victor in the strike of 1978. No official “end” was ever formally declared, and social stand-off continued for many years. For some, it’s still there. Workers at the *Citizens’ Voice* cost Capital Cities a great deal of money, among other things, proving that the workers would not

compromise. Conversely, while the striking workers gained independence and were able to produce a union newspaper, they suffered huge personal financial loss. Some workers eventually had to leave the newspaper simply because they were losing their homes—they couldn't make mortgage payments on strike wages. Both sides incurred social losses as well—I heard stories of neighbors who never spoke to each other again after differences over the strike. Both newspapers continue even today to jab at each other and criticize biased coverage, political hand-holding, and unfair practices. Managers at both papers still refuse to sit near each other at community social functions, despite the fact that reporters and ad executives are more open to this.

And community members do not come away from the aftermath of that long dispute with a fixed portrait of whom they were and are as Wilkes-Barre residents. But, I think they do see the conflict as a “we-experience,” something from which they both gained and lost. They still write letters to the editor or leave messages on the Say So line at the *Times Leader* that try to rearticulate perception of loyalty and differentiate between the haves and the have nots. Most of these messages draw from history, a sense of shared experience.

Claire Schechter joined the *Times Leader* staff in 1983, when there were still picketers in front of the building (as there continued to be for two more years following). She tells this story:

As long as there were picketers in front of the *Times Leader* building, I could count on pretty regularly being harassed when I crossed Public Square. It wasn't a scary, threatening thing. The guys would just yell, “Scab!” at me sometimes. But sometimes they didn't bother. They also knew me, so it was almost like it was their job to continue to say it, when everyone *knew* I was no more scab than they were. I mean I started at the *Times Leader* five whole years after the strike began. I wasn't taking any of their jobs. We all knew that.

Sometimes I'd turn around and say, “Come on guys, knock it off.” And they'd grin and stop. Sometimes, I knew better because they had a certain look in their eyes. I'd keep walking then and ignore them. It was almost like a script we were acting out.

...Over time there's been a gradual melting away of the animosity...Wilkes-Barre was working class then and it's working class now, but it's a different economy. Real economic potential has sort of passed us by, mostly because of our...immobility. We are a slow bunch to accept change. No, we're not what I'd call progressive, but there are sparks of hope. One of the things is that we're hard working in this area. It's very family-oriented around here and what our families have taught us over the years is a valuing of work. That, and sticking together, even when we don't agree with [each other]...Sometimes I think that the times when we don't agree are the most interesting. (Interview with Claire Schechter, 20 Apr. 1999)

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